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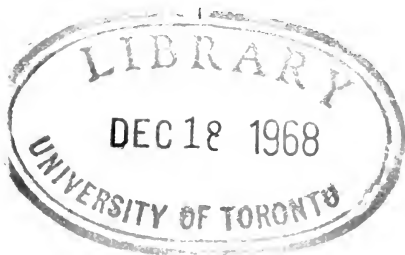
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THE CASTING AWAY OF MRS. LECKS ^{AND} MRS. ALESHINE.

PART I

I WAS on my way from San Francisco to Yokohama, when in a very desultory and gradual manner I became acquainted with Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine. The steamer, on which I was making a moderately rapid passage towards the land of the legended fan and the lacquered box, carried a fair complement of passengers, most of whom were Americans; and, among these, my attention was attracted from the very first day of the voyage to two middle-aged women who appeared to me very unlike the ordinary traveler or tourist. At first sight they might have been taken for farmers' wives who, for some unusual reason, had determined to make a voyage across the Pacific; but, on closer observation, one would have been more apt to suppose that they belonged to

the families of prosperous tradesmen in some little country town, where, besides the arts of rural housewifery, there would be opportunities of becoming acquainted in some degree with the ways and manners of the outside world. They were not of that order of persons who generally take first-class passages on steamships, but the stateroom occupied by Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine was one of the best in the vessel ; and, although they kept very much to themselves and showed no desire for the company or notice of the other passengers, they evidently considered themselves quite as good as any one else, and with as much right to voyage to any part of the world in any manner or style which pleased them.

Mrs. Lecks was a rather tall woman, large-boned and muscular, and her well-browned countenance gave indications of that conviction of superiority which gradually grows up in the minds of those who, for a long time, have had absolute control of the destinies of a state, or the multifarious affairs of a country household. Mrs. Aleshine was somewhat younger than her friend, somewhat shorter, and a great deal fatter. She had the same air of reliance upon her individual worth that characterized Mrs. Lecks, but there was a certain geniality about her which indicated that she would

have a good deal of forbearance for those who never had had the opportunity or the ability of becoming the thoroughly good housewife which she was herself.

These two worthy dames spent the greater part of their time on deck, where they always sat together in a place at the stern of the vessel which was well sheltered from wind and weather. As they sat thus they were generally employed in knitting, although this occupation did not prevent them from keeping up what seemed to me, as I passed them in my walks about the deck, a continuous conversation. From a question which Mrs. Lecks once asked me about a distant sail, our acquaintance began. There was no one on board for whose society I particularly cared, and as there was something quaint and odd about these countrywomen on the ocean which interested me, I was glad to vary my solitary promenades by an occasional chat with them. They were not at all backward in giving me information about themselves. They were both widows, and Mrs. Alesbine was going out to Japan to visit a son who had a position there in a mercantile house. Mrs. Lecks had no children, and was accompanying her friend because, as she said, she would not allow Mrs. Alesbine to make such a voyage as that by

herself ; and because, being quite able to do so, she did not know why she should not see the world as well as other people.

These two friends were not educated women. They made frequent mistakes in their grammar, and a good deal of Middle States provincialism showed itself in their pronunciation and expressions. But, although they brought many of their rural ideas to sea with them, they possessed a large share of that common sense which is available anywhere, and they frequently made use of it in a manner which was very amusing to me. I think, also, that they found in me a quarry of information concerning nautical matters, foreign countries, and my own affairs, the working of which helped to make us very good ship friends.

Our steamer touched at the Sandwich Islands ; and it was a little more than two days after we left Honolulu that, about nine o'clock in the evening, we had the misfortune to come into collision with an eastern-bound vessel. The fault was entirely due to the other ship, the lookout on which, although the night was rather dark and foggy, could easily have seen our lights in time to avoid collision, if he had not been asleep or absent from his post. Be this as it may, this vessel, which appeared to be a small steamer, struck us with

great force near our bows, and then backing disappeared into the fog, and we never saw or heard of her again. The general opinion was that she was injured very much more than we were, and that she probably sunk not very long after the accident; for when the fog cleared away, about an hour afterwards, nothing could be seen of her lights.

As it usually happens on occasions of accidents at sea, the damage to our vessel was at first reported to be slight; but it was soon discovered that our injuries were serious, and indeed disastrous. The hull of our steamer had been badly shattered on the port bow, and the water came in at a most alarming rate. For nearly two hours the crew and many of the passengers worked at the pumps, and everything possible was done to stop the enormous leak; but all labor to save the vessel was found to be utterly unavailing; and a little before midnight the captain announced that it was impossible to keep the steamer afloat, and that we must all take to the boats. The night was now clear, the stars were bright, and, as there was but little wind, the sea was comparatively smooth. With all these advantages, the captain assured us that there was no reason to apprehend danger, and he thought that by noon of the following

day we could easily make a small inhabited island, where we could be sheltered and cared for until we should be taken off by some passing vessel.

There was plenty of time for all necessary preparations, and these were made with much order and subordination. Some of the ladies among the cabin passengers were greatly frightened, and inclined to be hysterical. There were pale faces also among the gentlemen. But everybody obeyed the captain's orders, and all prepared themselves for the transfer to the boats. The first officer came among us, and told each of us what boats we were to take, and where we were to place ourselves on deck. I was assigned to a large boat which was to be principally occupied by steerage passengers; and as I came up from my stateroom, where I had gone to secure my money and some portable valuables, I met on the companion-way Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine, who expressed considerable dissatisfaction when they found that I was not going in the boat with them. They however hurried below, and I went on deck, where in about ten minutes I was joined by Mrs. Lecks, who apparently had been looking for me. She told me she had something very particular to say to me, and conducted me towards the stern of the vessel,

where, behind one of the deck-houses, we found Mrs. Aleshine.

“Look here,” said Mrs. Lecks, leading me to the rail and pointing downward, “do you see that boat there? It has been let down, and there is nobody in it. The boat on the other side has just gone off, full to the brim. I never saw so many people crowded into a boat. The other ones will be just as packed, I expect. I don’t see why we should n’t take this empty boat, now we’ve got a chance, instead of squeezin’ ourselves into those crowded ones. If any of the other people come afterwards, why, we shall have our choice of seats, and that’s considerable of a p’int, I should say, in a time like this.”

“That ’s so,” said Mrs. Aleshine, “and me and Mrs. Lecks would ’a’ got right in when we saw the boat was empty, if we had n’t been afraid to be there without any man, for it might have floated off, and neither of us don’t know nothin’ about rowin’. And then Mrs. Lecks she thought of you, supposin’ a young man who knew so much about the sea would know how to row.”

“Oh, yes,” said I, “but I can not imagine why this boat should have been left empty. I see a keg of water in it, and the oars, and some tin cans, and so I suppose it has been made ready for some-

body. Will you wait here a minute until I run forward and see how things are going on there?"

Amidships and forward I saw that there was some confusion among the people who were not yet in their boats, and I found that there was to be rather more crowding than at first was expected. People who had supposed that they were to go in a certain boat found there no place, and were hurrying to other boats. It now became plain to me that no time should be lost in getting into the small boat which Mrs. Lecks had pointed out, and which was probably reserved for some favored persons, as the officers were keeping the people forward and amidships, the other stern-boat having already departed. But as I acknowledged no reason why any one should be regarded with more favor than myself and the two women who were waiting for me, I slipped quietly aft, and joined Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine.

"We must get in as soon as we can," said I in a low voice, "for this boat may be discovered, and then there will be a rush for it. I suspect it may have been reserved for the captain and some of the officers, but we have as much right in it as they."

"And more too," replied Mrs. Lecks; "for we had nothin' to do with the steerin' and smashin'."

"But how are we goin' to get down there?" said Mrs. Aleshine. "There 's no steps."

"That is true," said I. "I should n't wonder if this boat is to be taken forward when the others are filled. We must scramble down as well as we can by the tackle at the bow and stern. I'll get in first and keep her close to the ship's side."

"That 's going to be a scratchy business," said Mrs. Lecks, "and I 'm of the opinion we ought to wait till the ship has sunk a little more, so we'll be nearer to the boat."

"It won't do to wait," said I, "or we shall not get in at all."

"And goodness gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, "I can't stand here and feel the ship sinkin' cold-blooded under me, till we've got where we can make an easy jump!"

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Lecks, "we won't wait. But the first thing to be done is for each one of us to put on one of these life-preservers. Two of them I brought from Mrs. Aleshine's and my cabin, and the other one I got next door, where the people had gone off and left it on the floor. I thought if anythin' happened on the way to the island, these would give us a chance to look about us; but it seems to me we'll need 'em more gettin' down them ropes than anywhere

else. I did intend puttin' on two myself to make up for Mrs. Aleshine's fat; but you must wear one of 'em, sir, now that you are goin' to join the party."

As I knew that two life-preservers would not be needed by Mrs. Lecks, and would greatly inconvenience her, I accepted the one offered me, but declined to put it on until it should be necessary, as it would interfere with my movements.

"Very well," said Mrs. Lecks, "if you think you are safe in gettin' down without it. But Mrs. Aleshine and me will put ours on before we begin sailor-scramblin'. We know how to do it, for we tried 'em on soon after we started from San Francisco. And now, Barb'ry Aleshine, are you sure you 've got everythin' you want, for it 'll be no use thinkin' about anythin' you 've forgot after the ship has sunk out of sight."

"There 's nothin' else I can think of," said Mrs. Aleshine; "at least, nothin' I can carry; and so I suppose we may as well begin, for your talk of the ship sinkin' under our feet gives me a sort o' feelin' like an oyster creepin' up and down my back."

Mrs. Lecks looked over the side at the boat, into which I had already descended. "I'll go first, Barb'ry Aleshine," said she, "and show you how."

The sea was quiet, and the steamer had already sunk so much that Mrs. Lecks's voice sounded frightfully near me, although she spoke in a low tone.

"Watch me," said she to her companion. "I 'm goin' to do just as he did, and you must follow in the same way."

So saying, she stepped on a bench by the rail; then, with one foot on the rail itself, she seized the ropes which hung from one of the davits to the bow of the boat. She looked down for a moment, and then she drew back.

"It 's no use," she said. "We must wait until she sinks more, an' I can get in easier."

This remark made me feel nervous. I did not know at what moment there might be a rush for this boat, nor when, indeed, the steamer might go down. The boat amidships on our side had rowed away some minutes before, and through the darkness I could distinguish another boat, near the bows, pushing off. It would be too late now for us to try to get into any other boat, and I did not feel that there was time enough for me to take this one to a place where the two women could more easily descend to her. Standing upright, I urged them not to delay.

"You see," said I, "I can reach you as soon as

you swing yourself off the ropes, and I'll help you down."

"If you're sure you can keep us from comin' down too sudden, we'll try it," said Mrs. Lecks, "but I'd as soon be drowned as to get to an island with a broken leg. And as to Mrs. Aleshine, if she was to slip she'd go slam through that boat to the bottom of the sea. Now, then, be ready! I'm comin' down!"

So saying, she swung herself off, and she was then so near me that I was able to seize her and make the rest of her descent comparatively easy. Mrs. Aleshine proved to be a more difficult subject. Even after I had a firm grasp of her capacious waist she refused to let go the ropes, for fear that she might drop into the ocean instead of the boat. But the reproaches of Mrs. Lecks and the downward weight of myself made her loosen her nervous grip, and, although we came very near going overboard together, I safely placed her on one of the thwarts.

I now unhooked the tackle from the stern; but before casting off at the bow, I hesitated, for I did not wish to desert any of those who might be expecting to embark in this boat. But I could hear no approaching footsteps, and from my position, close to the side of the steamer, I could see

nothing. Therefore I cast off, and, taking the oars, I pushed away and rowed to a little distance, where I could get whatever view was possible of the deck of the steamer. Seeing no forms moving about, I called out, and, receiving no answer, I shouted again at the top of my voice. I waited for nearly a minute, and, hearing nothing and seeing nothing, I became convinced that no one was left on the vessel.

"They are all gone," said I, "and we will pull after them as fast as we can."

And I began to row towards the bow of the steamer, in the direction which the other boats had taken.

"It's a good thing you can row," said Mrs. Lecks, settling herself comfortably in the stern-sheets, "for what Mrs. Aleshine and me would have done with them oars, I am sure I don't know."

"I'd never have got into this boat," said Mrs. Aleshine, "if Mr. Craig had n't been here."

"No, indeed," replied her friend. "You'd have gone to the bottom, hangin' for dear life to them ropes."

When I had rounded the bow of the steamer, which appeared to me to be rapidly settling in the water, I perceived at no great distance several lights which of course belonged to the other boats,

and I rowed as hard as I could, hoping to catch up with them, or at least to keep sufficiently near. It might be my duty to take off some of the people who had crowded into the other boats, probably supposing that this one had been loaded and gone. How such a mistake could have taken place I could not divine, and it was not my business to do so. Quite certain that no one was left on the sinking steamer, all I had to do was to row after the other boats, and to overtake them as soon as possible. I thought it would not take me very long to do this, but, after rowing for half an hour, Mrs. Ale-shine remarked that the lights seemed as far off, if not farther, than when we first started after them. Turning, I saw that this was the case, and was greatly surprised. With only two passengers I ought soon to have come up with those heavily laden boats, but, after I had thought over it a little, I considered that as each of them was probably pulled by half a dozen stout sailors, it was not so very strange that they should make as good or better headway than I did.

It was not very long after this that Mrs. Lecks said that she thought that the lights on the other boats must be going out, and that this, most probably, was due to the fact that the sailors had forgotten to fill their lanterns before they started.

"That sort of thing often happens," she said, "when people leave a place in a hurry."

But when I turned around, and peered over the dark waters, it was quite plain to me that it was not want of oil, but increased distance, which made those lights so dim. I could now perceive but three of them, and as the surface was agitated only by a gentle swell, I could not suppose that any of them were hidden from our view by waves. We were being left behind, that was certain, and all I could do was to row on as long and as well as I could in the direction which the other boats had taken. I had been used to rowing, and thought I pulled a good oar, and I certainly did not expect to be left behind in this way.

"I don't believe this boat has been emptied out since the last rain," said Mrs. Aleshine, "for my feet are wet, though I did n't notice it before."

At this I shipped my oars, and began to examine the boat. The bottom was covered with a movable floor of slats, and as I put my hand down I could feel the water welling up between the slats. The flooring was in sections, and lifting the one beneath me, I felt under it, and put my hand into six or eight inches of water.

The exact state of the case was now as plain to me as if it had been posted up on a bulletin board.

This boat had been found to be unseaworthy, and its use had been forbidden, all the people having been crowded into the others. This had caused confusion at the last moment, and, of course, we were supposed to be on some one of the other boats.

And now, here was I, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, in a leaky boat with two middle-aged women!

"Anythin' the matter with the floor?" asked Mrs. Lecks.

I let the section fall back into its place and looked aft. By the starlight I could see that my two companions had each fixed upon me a steadfast gaze. They evidently felt that something was the matter, and wanted to know what it was. I did not hesitate for a moment to inform them. They appeared to me to be women whom it would be neither advisable nor possible to deceive in a case like this.

"This boat has a leak in it," I said. "There is a lot of water in her already, and that is the reason we have got along so slowly."

"And that is why," said Mrs. Aleshine, "it was left empty. We ought to have known better than to expect to have a whole boat just for three of us. It would have been much more sensible,

I think, if we had tried to squeeze into one of the others."

"Now, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "don't you begin findin' fault with good fortune, when it comes to you. Here we've got a comfortable boat, with room enough to set easy and stretch out if we want to. If the water is comin' in, what we've got to do is to get it out again just as fast as we can. What's the best way to do that, Mr. Craig?"

"We must bail her out, and lose no time about it," said I. "If I can find the leak I may be able to stop it."

I now looked about for something to bail with, and the two women aided actively in the search. I found one leather scoop in the bow, but as it was well that we should all go to work, I took two tin cans that had been put in by some one who had begun to provision the boat, and proceeded to cut the tops from them with my jack-knife.

"Don't lose what's in 'em," said Mrs. Lecks; "that is, if it's anythin' we'd be likely to want to eat. If it's tomatoes, pour it into the sea, for nobody ought to eat tomatoes put up in tins."

I hastily passed the cans to Mrs. Lecks, and I saw her empty the contents of one into the sea,

and those of the other on a newspaper which she took from her pocket and placed in the stern.

I pulled up the movable floor and threw it overboard, and then began to bail.

"I thought," said Mrs. Aleshine, "that they always had pumps for leaks."

"Now, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "just gether yourself up on one of them seats, and go to work. The less talkin' we do and the more scoopin', the better it'll be for us."

I soon perceived that it would have been difficult to find two more valuable assistants in the bailing of a boat than Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine. They were evidently used to work, and were able to accommodate themselves to the unusual circumstances in which they were placed. We threw out the water very rapidly, and every little while I stopped bailing and felt about to see if I could discover where it came in. As these attempts met with no success, I gave them up after a time, and set about bailing with new vigor, believing that if we could get the boat nearly dry, I should surely be able to find the leak.

But, after working half an hour more, I found that the job would be a long one; and, if we all worked at once, we would all be tired out at once, and that might be disastrous. Therefore, I pro-

posed that we should take turns in resting, and Mrs. Aleshine was ordered to stop work for a time. After this Mrs. Lecks took a rest, and when she went to work I stopped bailing and began again to search for the leak.

For about two hours we worked in this way, and then I concluded it was useless to continue any longer this vain exertion. With three of us bailing we were able to keep the water at the level we first found it; but with only two at work it slightly gained upon us, so that now there was more water in the boat than when we first discovered it. The boat was an iron one, and the leak in it I could neither find nor remedy. It had probably been caused by the warping of the metal under a hot sun; an accident which, I am told, frequently occurs to iron boats. The little craft, which would have been a life-boat had its air-boxes remained intact, was now probably leaking from stem to stern; and in searching for the leak without the protection of the flooring, my weight had doubtless assisted in opening the seams, for it was quite plain that the water was now coming in more rapidly than it did at first. We were very tired, and even Mrs. Lecks, who had all along counseled us to keep at work and not to waste one breath in talking, now admitted that

it was of no use to try to get the water out of that boat.

It had been some hours since I had used the oars, but whether we had drifted or remained where we were when I stopped rowing, of course I could not know; but this mattered very little; our boat was slowly sinking beneath us, and it could make no difference whether we went down in one spot or another. I sat and racked my brain to think what could be done in this fearful emergency. To bail any longer was useless labor, and what else was there that we could do?

"When will it be time," asked Mrs. Leeks, "for us to put on the life-preservers? When the water gets nearly to the seats?"

I answered that we should not wait any longer than that, but in my own mind I could not see any advantage in putting them on at all. Why should we wish to lengthen our lives by a few hours of helpless floating upon the ocean?

"Very good," said Mrs. Leeks; "I'll keep a watch on the water. One of them cans was filled with lobster, which would be more than likely to disagree with us, and I've throwed it out; but the other had baked beans in it, and the best thing we can do is to eat some of these right away. They are mighty nourishin', and will keep up

strength as well as anythin', and then, as you said there's a keg of water in the boat, we can all take a drink of that, and it'll make us feel like new cre'tur's. You'll have to take the beans in your hands, for we've got no spoons nor forks."

Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine were each curled up out of reach of the water, the first in the stern, and the other on the aft thwart. The day was now beginning to break, and we could see about us very distinctly. Before reaching out her hands to receive her beans, Mrs. Aleshine washed them in the water in the boat, remarking at the same time that she might as well make use of it, since it was there. Having then wiped her hands on some part of her apparel, they were filled with beans from the newspaper held by Mrs. Lecks, and these were passed over to me. I was very hungry, and when I had finished my beans I agreed with my companions that although they would have been a great deal better if heated up with butter, pepper, and salt, they were very comforting as they were. One of the empty cans was now passed to me, and after having been asked by Mrs. Lecks to rinse it out very carefully, we all satisfied our taste from the water in the keg.

"Cold baked beans and lukewarm water ain't exactly company vittles," said Mrs. Aleshine, "but

there's many a poor wretch would be glad to get 'em."

I could not imagine any poor wretch who would be glad of the food, together with the attending circumstances; but I did not say so.

"The water is just one finger from the bottom of the seat," said Mrs. Lecks, who had been stooping over to measure, "and it's time to put on the life-preservers."

"Very good," said Mrs. Aleshine; "hand me mine."

Each of us now buckled on a life-preserver, and as I did so I stood up upon a thwart and looked about me. It was quite light now, and I could see for a long distance over the surface of the ocean, which was gently rolling in wide, smooth swells. As we rose upon the summit of one of these I saw a dark spot upon the water, just on the edge of our near horizon. "Is that the steamer?" I thought; "and has she not yet sunk?"

At this there came to me a glimmering of courageous hope. If the steamer had remained afloat so long, it was probable that on account of watertight compartments, or for some other reason, her sinking had reached its limit, and that if we could get back to her we might be saved. But, alas, how were we to get back to her? This boat

would sink long, long before I could row that distance.

However, I soon proclaimed the news to my companions, whereupon Mrs. Aleshine prepared to stand upon a thwart and see for herself. But Mrs. Lecks restrained her.

"Don't make things worse, Barb'ry Aleshine," said she, "by tumblin' overboard. If we 've got to go into the water, let us do it decently and in order. If that 's the ship, Mr. Craig, don't you suppose we can float ourselves to it in some way?"

I replied that by the help of a life-preserver a person who could swim might reach the ship.

"But neither of us can swim," said Mrs. Lecks, "for we've lived where the water was never more 'n a foot deep, except in time of freshets, when there 's no swimmin' for man or beast. But if we see you swim perhaps we can follow, after a fashion. At any rate, we must do the best we can, and that 's all there is to be done."

"The water now," remarked Mrs. Aleshine, "is so near to the bottom of my seat that I 've got to stand up, tumble overboard or no."

"All right," remarked Mrs. Lecks; "we 'd better all stand up, and let the boat sink under us. That will save our jumpin' overboard, or rollin' out any which way, which might be awkward."

"Goodness gracious me!" exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine. "You set the oysters creepin' over me again! First you talk of the ship sinkin' under us, and now it 's the boat goin' to the bottom under our feet. Before any sinkin 's to be done I 'd ruther get out."

"Now, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "stand up straight, and don't talk so much. It 'll be a great deal better to be let down gradual than to flop into the water all of a bunch."

"Very well," said Mrs. Aleshine. "It may be best to get used to it by degrees, but I must say I wish I was home."

As for me, I would have much preferred to jump overboard at once, instead of waiting in this cold-blooded manner; but as my companions had so far preserved their presence of mind, I did not wish to do anything which might throw them into a panic. I believed there would be no danger from the suction caused by the sinking of a small boat like this, and if we took care not to entangle ourselves with it in any way, we might as well follow Mrs. Lecks's advice as not. So we all stood up, Mrs. Lecks in the stern, I in the bow, and Mrs. Aleshine on a thwart between us. The last did not appear to have quite room enough for a steady footing, but, as she remarked, it did not matter

very much, as the footing, broad or narrow, would not be there very long.

I am used to swimming, and have never hesitated to take a plunge into river or ocean, but I must admit that it was very trying to my nerves to stand up this way and wait for a boat to sink beneath me. How the two women were affected I do not know. They said nothing, but their faces indicated that something disagreeable was about to happen, and that the less that was said about it the better.

The boat had now sunk so much that the water was around Mrs. Aleshine's feet, her standing-place being rather lower than ours. I made myself certain that there were no ropes nor any other means of entanglement near my companions or myself, and then I waited. There seemed to be a good deal of buoyancy in the bow and stern of the boat, and it was a frightfully long time in sinking. The suspense became so utterly unendurable that I was tempted to put one foot on the edge of the boat, and, by tipping it, put an end to this nerve-rack; but I refrained, for I probably would throw the women off their balance, when they might fall against some part of the boat, and do themselves a hurt. I had just relinquished this intention, when two little waves seemed to rise one on each

side of Mrs. Aleshine, and gently flowing over the side of the boat, they flooded her feet with water.

"Hold your breaths!" I shouted. And now I experienced a sensation which must have been very like that which comes to a condemned criminal at the first indication of the pulling of the drop. Then there was a horrible sinking, a gurgle, and a swash, and the ocean, over which I had been gazing, appeared to rise up and envelop me.

In a moment, however, my head was out of the water, and, looking hastily about me, I saw, close by, the heads and shoulders of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine. The latter was vigorously winking her eyes and blowing from her mouth some sea water that had got into it; but as soon as her eyes fell upon me she exclaimed: "That was ever so much more suddint than I thought it was goin' to be!"

"Are you both all right?"

"I suppose I am," said Mrs. Aleshine, "but I never thought that a person with a life-preserver on would go clean under the water."

"But since you've come up again, you ought to be satisfied," said Mrs. Lecks. "And now," she added, turning her face towards me, "which way ought we to try to swim? and have we got everythin' we want to take with us?"

"What we have n't got we can't get," remarked Mrs. Aleshine; "and as for swimmin', I expect I 'm goin' to make a poor hand at it."

I had a hope, which was not quite strong enough to be a belief, that, supported by their life-preservers, the two women might paddle themselves along; and that, by giving them in turn a helping hand, I might eventually get them to the steamer. There was a strong probability that I would not succeed, but I did not care to think of that.

I now swam in front of my companions, and endeavored to instruct them in the best method of propelling themselves with their arms and their hands. If they succeeded in this, I thought I would give them some further lessons in striking out with their feet. After watching me attentively, Mrs. Lecks did manage to move herself slowly through the smooth water, but poor Mrs. Aleshine could do nothing but splash.

"If there was anythin' to take hold of," she said to me, "I might get along, but I can't get any grip on the water, though you seem to do it well enough. Look there!" she added in a higher voice. "Is n't that an oar floatin' over there? If you can get that for me, I believe I can row myself much better than I can swim."

This seemed an odd idea, but I swam over to the floating oar, and brought it her. I was about to show her how she could best use it, but she declined my advice.

“If I do it at all,” she said, “I must do it in my own way.” And, taking the oar in her strong hands, she began to ply it on the water, very much in the way in which she would handle a broom. At first she dipped the blade too deeply, but correcting this error, she soon began to paddle herself along at a slow but steady rate.

“Capital!” I cried. “You do that admirably!”

“Anybody who’s swept as many rooms as I have,” she said, “ought to be able to handle anythin’ that can be used like a broom.”

“Is n’t there another oar?” cried Mrs. Leeks, who had now been left a little distance behind us. “If there is, I want one.”

Looking about me, I soon discovered another floating oar, and brought it to Mrs. Leeks, who, after holding it in various positions, so as to get “the hang of it,” as she said, soon began to use it with as much skill as that shown by her friend. If either of them had been obliged to use an oar in the ordinary way, I fear they would have had a bad time of it; but, considering the implement in the light of a broom, its use immediately

became familiar to them, and they got on remarkably well.

I now took a position a little in advance of my companions, and as I swam slowly they were easily able to keep up with me. Mrs. Aleshine, being so stout, floated much higher out of the water than either Mrs. Lecks or I, and this permitted her to use her oar with a great deal of freedom. Sometimes she would give such a vigorous brush to the water that she would turn herself almost entirely around, but, after a little practice, she learned to avoid undue efforts of this kind.

I was not positively sure that we were going in the right direction, for my position did not allow me to see very far over the water; but I remembered that when I was standing up in the boat and made my discovery, the sun was just about to rise in front of me, while the dark spot on the ocean lay to my left. Judging, therefore, from the present position of the sun, which was not very high, I concluded that we were moving towards the north, and therefore in the right direction. How far off the steamer might be I had no idea, for I was not accustomed to judging distances at sea; but I believed that if we were careful of our strength, and if the ocean continued

as smooth as it now was, we might eventually reach the vessel, provided she were yet afloat.

"After you are fairly in the water," said Mrs. Aleshine, as she swept along, although without the velocity which that phrase usually implies, "it is n't half so bad as I thought it would be. For one thing, it don't feel a bit salt, although I must say it tasted horribly that way when I first went into it."

"You did n't expect to find pickle-brine, did you?" said Mrs. Lecks. "Though if it was, I suppose we could float on it settin'."

"And as to bein' cold," said Mrs. Aleshine, "the part of me that's in is actually more comfortable than that which is out."

"There's one thing I would have been afraid of," said Mrs. Lecks, "if we had n't made preparations for it, and that's sharks."

"Preparations!" I exclaimed. "How in the world did you prepare for sharks?"

"Easy enough," said Mrs. Lecks. "When we went down into our room to get ready to go away in the boats we both put on black stockin's. I've read that sharks never bite colored people, although if they see a white man in the water they'll snap him up as quick as lightnin'; and black stockin's was the nearest we could come to

it. You see, I thought as like as not we'd have some sort of an upset before we got through."

"It's a great comfort," remarked Mrs. Aleshine, "and I'm very glad you thought of it, Mrs. Lecks. After this I shall make it a rule: Black stockin's for sharks."

"I suppose in your case," said Mrs. Lecks, addressing me, "dark trousers will do as well."

To which I answered that I sincerely hoped they would.

"Another thing I'm thankful for," said Mrs. Aleshine, "is that I thought to put on a flannel skeert."

"And what's the good of it," said Mrs. Lecks, "when it's soppin' wet?"

"Flannel's flannel," replied her friend, "whether it's wet or dry; and if yqu'd had the rheumatism as much as I have, you'd know it."

To this Mrs. Lecks replied with a sniff, and asked me how soon I thought we would get sight of the ship, for if we were going the wrong way, and had to turn round and go back, it would certainly be very provoking.

I should have been happy indeed to be able to give a satisfactory answer to this question. Every time that we rose upon a swell I threw a rapid glance around the whole circle of the horizon, and

at last, not a quarter of an hour after Mrs. Leck's question, I was rejoiced to see, almost in the direction in which I supposed it ought to be, the dark spot which I had before discovered. I shouted the glad news, and as we rose again my companions strained their eyes in the direction to which I pointed. They both saw it, and were greatly satisfied.

"Now, then," said Mrs. Aleshine, "it seems as if there was somethin' to work for," and she began to sweep her oar with great vigor.

"If you want to tire yourself out before you get there, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "you'd better go on in that way. Now what I advise is that we stop rowin' altogether and have somethin' to eat, for I'm sure we need it to keep up our strength."

"Eat!" I cried. "What are you going to eat? Do you expect to catch fish?"

"And eat'em raw?" said Mrs. Lecks. "I should think not. But do you suppose, Mr. Craig, that Mrs. Aleshine and me would go off and leave that ship without takin' somethin' to eat by the way? Let's all gether here in a bunch, and see what sort of a meal we can make. And now, Barb'ry Aleshine, if you lay your oar down there on the water, I recommend you to tie it to one of your

bonnet-strings, or it 'll be floatin' away, and you won't get it again."

As she said this, Mrs. Lecks put her right hand down into the water, and fumbled about apparently in search of a pocket. I could not but smile as I thought of the condition of food when, for an hour or more, it had been a couple of feet under the surface of the ocean; but my ideas on the subject were entirely changed when I saw Mrs. Lecks hold up in the air two German sausages, and shake the briny drops from their smooth and glittering surfaces.

"There's nothin'," she said, "like sausages for shipwreck and that kind o' thing. They're very sustainin', and bein' covered with a tight skin, water can't get at 'em, no matter how you carry 'em. I would n't bring these out in the boat, because havin' the beans we might as well eat them. Have you a knife about you, Mr. Craig?"

I produced a dripping jack-knife, and after the open blade had been waved in the air to dry it a little, Mrs. Lecks proceeded to divide one of the sausages, handing the other to me to hold meanwhile.

"Now don't go eatin' sausages without bread, if you don't want 'em to give you dyspepsy," said Mrs. Aleshine, who was tugging at a submarine pocket.

"I'm very much afraid your bread is all soaked," said Mrs. Lecks.

To which her friend replied that that remained to be seen, and forthwith produced with a splash a glass preserve-jar with a metal top.

"I saw this, nearly empty, as I looked into the ship's pantry, and I stuffed into it all the soft biscuits it would hold. There was some sort of jam left at the bottom, so that the one who gets the last biscuit will have somethin' of a little spread on it. And now, Mrs. Lecks," she continued triumphantly, as she unscrewed the top, "that rubber ring has kept 'em as dry as chips. I'm mighty glad of it, for I had trouble enough gettin' this jar into my pocket, and gettin' it out, too, for that matter."

Floating thus, with our hands and shoulders above the water, we made a very good meal from the sausages and soft biscuit.

"Barb'ry Alesine," said Mrs. Lecks, as her friend proceeded to cut the second sausage, "don't you lay that knife down when you've done with it, as if 't was an oar; for if you do it 'll sink, as like as not, about six miles. I've read that the ocean is as deep as that in some places."

"Goodness gracious me!" exclaimed Mrs. Alesine, "I hope we are not over one of them deep spots."

"There 's no knowin'," said Mrs. Lecks, "but if it 's more comfortin' to think it 's shallerer, we 'll make up our minds that way. Now, then," she continued, "we 'll finish off this meal with a little somethin' to drink. I'm not given to takin' spirits, but I never travel without a little whisky, ready mixed with water, to take if it should be needed."

So saying, she produced from one of her pockets a whisky-flask tightly corked, and of its contents we each took a sip, Mrs. Aleshine remarking that, leaving out being chilled or colicky, we were never likely to need it more than now.

Thus refreshed and strengthened, Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine took up their oars, while I swam slightly in advance, as before. When, with occasional intermissions of rest, and a good deal of desultory conversation, we had swept and swam for about an hour, Mrs. Lecks suddenly exclaimed: "I can see that thing ever so much plainer now, and I don't believe it 's a ship at all. To me it looks like bushes."

"You 're mighty long-sighted without your specs," said Mrs. Aleshine, "and I'm not sure but what you 're right."

For ten minutes or more I had been puzzling over the shape of the dark spot which was now nearly all the time in sight. Its peculiar form had

filled me with a dreadful fear that it was the steamer, bottom upwards, although I knew enough about nautical matters to have no good reason to suppose that this could be the case. I am not farsighted, but when Mrs. Lecks suggested bushes, I gazed at the distant object with totally different ideas, and soon began to believe that it was not a ship, either right side up or wrong side up, but that it might be an island. This belief I proclaimed to my companions, and for some time we all worked with increased energy in the desire to get near enough to make ourselves certain in regard to this point.

"As true as I'm standin' here," said Mrs. Lecks, who, although she could not read without spectacles, had remarkably good sight at long range, "them is trees and bushes that I see before me, though they do seem to be growin' right out of the water."

"There 's an island under them; you may be sure of that!" I cried. "And is n't this ever so much better than a sinking ship?"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Mrs. Aleshine. "I 'm used to the ship, and as long as it did n't sink I 'd prefer it. There 's plenty to eat on board of it, and good beds to sleep on, which is more than can be expected on a little bushy place like

that ahead of us. But then, the ship might sink all of a suddint, beds, vittles, and all."

"Do you suppose that is the island the other boats went to?" asked Mrs. Lecks.

This question I had already asked of myself. I had been told that the island to which the captain intended to take his boats lay about thirty miles south of the point where we left the steamer. Now I knew very well that we had not come thirty miles, and had reason to believe, moreover, that the greater part of the progress we had made had been towards the north. It was not at all probable that the position of this island was unknown to our captain; and it must, therefore, have been considered by him as an unsuitable place for the landing of his passengers. There might be many reasons for this unsuitableness; the island might be totally barren and desolate; it might be the abode of unpleasant natives; and, more important than anything else, it was, in all probability, a spot where steamers never touched.

But, whatever its disadvantages, I was most wildly desirous to reach it; more so, I believe, than either of my companions. I do not mean that they were not sensible of their danger, and desirous to be freed from it; but they were women who had probably had a rough time of it during

a great part of their lives, and on emerging from their little circle of rural experiences accepted with equanimity, and almost as a matter of course, the rough times which come to people in the great outside world.

"I do not believe," I said, in answer to Mrs. Lecks, "that that is the island to which the captain would have taken us; but, whatever it is, it is dry land, and we must get there as soon as we can."

"That 's true," said Mrs. Aleshine, "for I 'd like to have ground nearer to my feet than six miles, and if we don't find anythin' to eat and any place to sleep when we get there, it 's no more than can be said of where we are now."

"You 're too particular, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "about your comforts. If you find the ground too hard to sleep on when you get there, you can put on your life-preserver, and go to bed in the water."

"Very good," said Mrs. Aleshine; "and if these islands are made of coral, as I 've heard they was, and if they 're as full of small p'int's as some coral I 've got at home, you 'll be glad to take a berth by me, Mrs. Lecks."

I counseled my companions to follow me as rapidly as possible, and we all pushed vigorously

forward. When we had approached near enough to the island to see what sort of place it really was, we perceived that it was a low-lying spot, apparently covered with verdure, and surrounded, as far as we could see as we rose on the swells, by a rocky reef, against which a tolerably high surf was running. I knew enough of the formation of these coral islands to suppose that within this reef was a lagoon of smooth water, into which there were openings through the rocky barrier. It was necessary to try to find one of these, for it would be difficult and perhaps dangerous to attempt to land through the surf.

Before us we could see a continuous line of white-capped breakers; and so I led my little party to the right, hoping that we would soon see signs of an opening in the reef.

We swam and paddled, however, for a long time, and still the surf rolled menacingly on the rocks before us. We were now as close to the island as we could approach with safety, and I determined to circumnavigate it, if necessary, before I would attempt, with these two women, to land upon that jagged reef. At last we perceived, at no great distance before us, a spot where there seemed to be no breakers; and when we reached it we found, to our unutterable delight, that here was smooth

water flowing through a wide opening in the reef. The rocks were piled up quite high, and the reef, at this point at least, was a wide one; for as we neared the opening we found that it narrowed very soon and made a turn to the left, so that from the outside we could not see into the lagoon.

I swam into this smooth water, followed close by Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine, who, however, soon became unable to use their oars, owing to the proximity of the rocks. Dropping these useful implements, they managed to paddle after me with their hands; and they were as much astonished as I was when, just after making the slight turn, we found stretched across the narrow passage a great iron bar about eight or ten inches above the water. A little farther on, and two or three feet above the water, another iron bar extended from one rocky wall to the other. Without uttering a word, I examined the lower bar, and found one end of it fastened by means of a huge padlock to a great staple driven into the rock. The lock was securely wrapped in what appeared to be tarred canvas. A staple through an eye-hole in the bar secured the other end of it to the rocks.

"These bars were put here," I exclaimed, "to keep out boats, whether at high or low water

You see they can only be thrown out of the way by taking off the padlocks."

"They won't keep us out," said Mrs. Lecks, "for we can duck under. I suppose whoever put 'em here did n't expect anybody to arrive on life-preservers."

PART II

ADOPPING Mrs. Lecks's suggestion, I "ducked" my head under the bar, and passed to the other side of it. Mrs. Lecks, with but little trouble, followed my example; but Mrs. Aleshine, who, by reason of her stoutness, floated so much higher out of the water than her friend and I, found it impossible to get herself under the bar. In whatever manner she made the attempt, her head or her shoulders were sure to bump and arrest her progress.

"Now, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, who had been watching her, "if you ever want to get out of this salt water, you 've got to make up your mind to take some of it into your mouth and into your eyes; that is, if you don't keep 'em shut. Get yourself as close to that bar as you can, and I'll come and put you under."

So saying, Mrs. Lecks returned to the other side of the bar, and having made Mrs. Aleshine bow

down her head and close her eyes and mouth, she placed both hands upon her companion's broad shoulders and threw as much weight as possible upon them. Mrs. Aleshine almost disappeared beneath the water, but she came up sputtering and blinking on the other side of the bar, where she was quickly joined by Mrs. Lecks.

"Merciful me!" exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, wiping her wet face with her still wetter sleeve, "I never supposed the heathens would be up to such tricks as makin' us do that!"

I had waited to give any assistance that might be required, and, while doing so, had discovered another bar under the water, which proved that entrance at almost any stage of the tide had been guarded against. Warning my companions not to strike their feet against this submerged bar, we paddled and pushed ourselves around the turn in the rocky passage, and emerged into the open lagoon.

This smooth stretch of water, which separated the island from its encircling reef, was here about a hundred feet wide; and the first thing that arrested our attention as we gazed across it was a little wharf or landing-stage, erected upon the narrow beach of the island, almost opposite to us.

"As sure as I stand here," exclaimed Mrs. Lecks, who never seemed to forget her upright position, "somebody lives in this place!"

"And it is n't a stickery coral island, either," cried Mrs. Aleshine, "for that sand's as smooth as any I ever saw."

"Whoever does live here," resumed Mrs. Lecks, "has got to take us in, whether they like it or not; and the sooner we get over there, the better."

Mrs. Aleshine now regretted the loss of her oar, and suggested that some one of us who could get under bars easily should go back after it. But Mrs. Lecks would listen to no such proposition.

"Let the oars go," she said. "We won't want 'em again, for I'll never leave this place if I have to scoop myself out to sea with an oar."

I told the two women that I could easily tow them across this narrow piece of water; and instructing Mrs. Lecks to take hold of the tail of my coat, while Mrs. Aleshine grasped her companion's dress, I began to swim slowly towards the beach, towing my companions behind me.

"Goodnessful gracious me!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, with a great bounce and a splash, "look at the fishes!"

The water in the lagoon was so clear that it was almost transparent, and beneath us and around us we could see fish, some large and some small, swimming about as if they were floating in the air, while down below the white sandy bottom seemed to sparkle in the sunlight.

“Now, don’t jerk my skeert off on account of the fishes,” said Mrs. Lecks. “I expect there was just as many outside, though we could n’t see ’em. But I must say that this water looks as if it had been boiled and filtered.”

If any inhabitant of the island had then been standing on the wharf, he would have beheld on the surface of the lagoon the peculiar spectacle of a man’s head surmounted by a wet and misshapen straw hat, and followed by two other heads, each wearing a dripping and bedraggled bonnet, while beneath, among the ripples of the clear water, would be seen the figures belonging to these three heads, each dressed in the clothes ordinarily worn on dry land.

As I swam I could see before me, on the island, nothing but a mass of low-growing, tropical vegetation, behind which rose some palms and other trees. I made for the little wharf, from which steps came down into the water, and as soon as we reached it we all clambered rapidly up, and

stood dripping upon the narrow platform, stamping our feet and shaking our clothes.

"Do you see that house?" said Mrs. Lecks. "That's where they live, and I wonder which way we must go to get there."

From this somewhat elevated position I could plainly see, over the tops of the bushes and low trees, the upper part of the roof of a house. When I found the bars across the passage in the reef, I had easily come to the conclusion that the inhabitants of this island were not savages; and now since I had seen the wharf and the roof of this house, I felt quite convinced that we had reached the abode of civilized beings. They might be pirates or some other sort of sea miscreant, but they were certainly not savages or cannibals.

Leaving the wharf, we soon found a broad path through the bushes, and in a few moments reached a wide, open space, in which stood a handsome, modern-built house. It was constructed after the fashion of tropical houses belonging to Europeans, with jalousied porches and shaded balconies; the grounds about it were neatly laid out, and behind it was a walled inclosure, probably a garden.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, "I'd like to be less drippin' before I make a call on genteel folks!"

"Genteel folks!" exclaimed Mrs. Lecks indignantly. "If you're too proud to go in as you are, Barb'ry Aleshine, you can go set in the sun till you're dry. As for me, I'm goin' to ask for the lady of the house, and if she don't like me she can lump me, so long as she gives me somethin' to eat and a dry bed to get into."

I was too much amazed to speak, but my companions took everything as a matter of course. They had expected to see strange things in the outer world, and they were not surprised when they saw them. My mind was not capable of understanding the existence of an establishment like this on a little island in mid-ocean. But it was useless for me to attempt to reason on this apparent phenomenon; and, indeed, there was no time for it, for Mrs. Lecks walked boldly up to the front door and plied the knocker, stepping back immediately, so that she might not drip too much water on the porch.

"When they come," she said, "we'll ask 'em to let us in the back way, so that we sha'n't slop up their floors any more than we can help."

We waited for a couple of minutes, and then I, as the member of the party who dripped the least, went up on the porch and knocked again.

"It's my belief they're not at home," said Mrs. Lecks, after we had waited some time longer, "but

perhaps we 'll find some of the servants in"; and she led the way to the back part of the house.

As we passed the side of the mansion I noticed that all the window-shutters were closed, and my growing belief that the place was deserted became a conviction after we had knocked several times at a door at the back of the building without receiving any answer.

"Well, they 're all gone out, that 's certain!" said Mrs. Lecks.

"Yes, and they barred up the entrance to the island when they left," I added.

"I wonder if there 's another house in the neighborhood?" asked Mrs. Aleshine.

"I don't believe," said I, "that the neighborhood is very thickly settled; but if you will wait here a few minutes, I will run around this wall and see what there is beyond. I may find the huts of some natives or workpeople."

I followed a path by the side of the garden wall, but when I reached the end of the inclosure I could see nothing before me but jungle and forest, with paths running in several directions. I followed one of these, and very soon came out upon an open beach, with the reef lying beyond it. From the form of the beach and the reef, and from the appearance of things generally, I

began to think that this was probably a very small island, and that the house we had seen was the only one on it. I returned and reported this belief to my companions.

Now that Mrs. Aleshine had no fear of appearing in an untidy condition before "genteel folks," her manner changed very much. "If the family has gone into the country," said she, "or whatever else they 've done, I want to get into this house as soon as I can. I expect we can find something to eat. At any rate we can get ourselves dry, and lay down somewhere to rest, for not a wink has one of us slept since night before last."

"I should think," said Mrs. Lecks, addressing me, "that if you could manage to climb up to them second-story windows, you might find one of them that you could get in, and then come down and open the door for us. Everybody is likely to forget to fasten some of the windows on the upper floors. I know it is n't right to force our way into other people's houses, but there 's nothin' else to be done, and there 's no need of our talkin' about it."

I agreed with her perfectly, and taking off my coat and shoes I climbed up one of the columns of the veranda, and got upon its roof. This extended nearly the whole length of two sides of

the house. I walked along it and tried all the shutters, and I soon came to one in which some of the movable slats had been broken. Thrusting my hand and arm through the aperture thus formed, I unhooked the shutters and opened them. The sash was fastened down by one of the ordinary contrivances used for such purposes, but with the blade of my jack-knife I easily pushed the bolt aside, raised the sash, and entered. I found myself in a small hall at the head of a flight of stairs. Down these I hurried, and, groping my way through the semi-darkness of the lower story, I reached a side door. This was fastened by two bolts and a bar, and I quickly had it open.

Stepping outside, I called Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine.

"Well," said the latter, "I'm sure I'll be glad to get in, and as we've squeezed most of the water out of our clothes we won't make so much of a mess, after all."

We now entered, and I opened one of shutters.

"Let's go right into the kitchen," said Mrs. Lecks, "and make a fire. That's the first thing to do."

But Mrs. Lecks soon discovered that this mansion was very different from a country dwelling in one of our Middle States. Externally, and as far

as I had been able to observe its internal arrangements, it resembled the houses built by English residents which I had seen in the West Indies. It was a dwelling in which modern ideas in regard to construction and furnishing adapted themselves to the requirements of a tropical climate. Apparently there was no kitchen. There were no stairs leading to a lower floor, and the darkened rooms, into which my companions peered, were certainly not used for culinary purposes.

In the mean time I had gone out of the door by which we had entered, and soon discovered, on the other side of the house, a small building with a chimney to it, which I felt sure must be the kitchen. The door and shutters were fastened, but before making any attempt to open them, I returned to announce my discovery.

“Door locked, is it?” said Mrs. Aleshine. “Just wait a minute.”

She then disappeared, but in a very short time came out, carrying a bunch of large keys.

“It’s always the way,” said she, as the two followed me round the back of the house, “when people shut up a house and leave it, to put all the door-keys in the back corner of some drawer in the hall, and to take only the front-door key with them. So, you see, I knew just where to go for these.”

"It's a poor hen," said Mrs. Lecks, "that begins to cackle when she's goin' to her nest; the wise ones wait till they're comin' away. Now we'll see if one of them keys fit."

Greatly to the triumph of Mrs. Aleshine, the second or third key I tried unlocked the door. Entering, we found ourselves in a good-sized kitchen, with a great fireplace at one end of it. A door opened from the room into a shed where there was a pile of dry twigs and firewood.

"Let's have a fire as quick as we can," said Mrs. Lecks, "for since I went into that shet-up house I've been chilled to the bones."

"That 's so," said Mrs. Aleshine, "and now I know how a fish keeps comfortable in the water, and how dreadfully wet and flabby it must feel when it's taken out."

I brought in a quantity of wood and kindling, and, finding matches in a tin box on the wall, I went to work to make a fire, and was soon rewarded by a crackling blaze. Turning around, I was amazed at the actions of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine. I had expected to see them standing shivering behind me, waiting for the fire to be made; but, instead of that, they were moving rapidly here and there, saying not a word, but going as straight to cupboard, closet, and pantry

as the hound follows the track of the hare. From a wild chaos of uncongenial surroundings, these two women had dropped into a sphere in which they were perfectly at home. The kitchen was not altogether like those to which they had been accustomed, but it was a well-appointed one, and their instincts and practice made them quickly understand where they would find what they wanted. I gazed on them with delight while one filled a kettle from a little pump in the corner which brought water from a cistern, and the other appeared from the pantry, carrying a tea-caddy and a tin biscuit-box.

"Now, then," said Mrs. Lecks, hanging the kettle on a crane over the fire, and drawing up a chair, "by the time we 've got a little dried off, the kettle will bile, and we 'll have some hot tea; and then the best thing to do is to go to bed."

"We 'll take time to have a bite first," said Mrs. Aleshine, "for I was never so near famished in my life. I brought out a box nearly full of biscuits, and there 's sardines in this, Mr. Craig, which you can easy open with your knife."

I piled on more wood, and we gathered close around the genial heat. The sunshine was hot outside, but that did not prevent the fire from being most comforting and refreshing to us.

As soon as the kettle began to simmer, up jumped Mrs. Aleshine. A sugar-bowl and some cups were placed upon a table, and in a short time we were cheered and invigorated by hot tea, biscuits, and sardines.

"This is n't much of a meal," said Mrs. Aleshine apologetically, "but there's no time to cook nothin', and the sooner we get off our wet things and find some beds, the better."

"If I can once get into bed," said Mrs. Lecks, "all I ask is that the family will not come back till I have had a good long nap. After that, they can do what they please."

We now went back to the house and ascended the main stairway, which led up to a large central hall.

"We won't go into the front rooms," said Mrs. Lecks, "for we don't want to make no more disturbance than we can help; but if we can find the smallest kind of rooms in the back, with beds in 'em, it is all we can ask."

The first chamber we entered was a good-sized one, neatly furnished, containing a bedstead with uncovered mattress and pillows. Opening a closet door, Mrs. Lecks exclaimed: "This is a man's room, Mr. Craig, and you 'd better take it. Look at the trousers and coats! There's no bedclothes in here, but I 'll see if I can't find some."

In a few minutes she returned, bearing blankets, sheets, and a pillow-case. With Mrs. Aleshine on one side of the bedstead and Mrs. Lecks on the other, the sheets and blankets were laid with surprising deftness and rapidity, and in a few moments I saw before me a most inviting bed.

While Mrs. Aleshine held a pillow in her teeth as she pulled on the pillow-case with both hands, Mrs. Lecks looked around the room with the air of an attentive hostess. "I guess you 'll be comfortable, Mr. Craig," she said, "and I advise you to sleep just as long as you can. We 'll take the room on the other side of the hall, but I 'm first goin' down to see if the kitchen fire is safe, and to fasten the doors."

I offered to relieve her of this trouble, but she promptly declined my services. "When it 's rowin' or swimmin', you can do it, Mr. Craig; but when it 's lockin' up and lookin' to fires, I 'll attend to that myself."

My watch had stopped, but I suppose it was the middle of the afternoon when I went to bed, and I slept steadily until some hours after sunrise the next morning, when I was awakened by a loud knock at the door.

"It 's time to get up," said the voice of Mrs. Lecks, "and if your clothes are not entirely dry, you 'd better see if there is n't somethin' in that

closet you can put on. After a while I'll make a big fire in the kitchen, and dry all our things."

I found my clothes were still very damp, and after investigating the contents of the closet and bureau, I was able to supply myself with linen and a light summer suit which fitted me fairly well. I even found socks and a pair of slippers.

When I entered the kitchen, I first opened wide my eyes with delight, and then I burst out laughing. Before me was a table covered with a white cloth, with plates, cups, and everything necessary upon it; at one end was a steaming tea-pot, and at the other a dish of some kind of hot meat; and Mrs. Aleshine was just taking a pan of newly baked biscuits from a small iron oven.

"I don't wonder you laugh," said Mrs. Lecks, "but our clothes was still wet, and we had to take just what we could find. I'm not in the habit of goin' about in a white muslin wrapper with blue-ribbon trimmin's; and as for Mrs. Aleshine, I did think we 'd never find anythin' that she could get into; but there must be one stout woman in the family, for that yeller frock with black buttons fits her well enough, though I must say it's a good deal short."

"I never thought," said Mrs. Aleshine, as she sat down at the tea-pot, "that the heathens had so

many conveniences, 'specially bakin' powders and Dutch ovens. For my part, I always supposed that they used their altars for bakin', when they was n't offerin' up victims on 'em."

"Have you got it into your head, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, looking up from the dish of potted beef she was serving, "that this house belongs to common heathen? I expect that most of the savages who live on these desert islands has been converted by the missionaries, but they 'd have to take 'em from Genesis to Revelations a good many times before they 'd get 'm to the p'int of havin' force-pumps in their kitchens and spring mattresses on their beds. As far as I 've seen this house, it looks as if the family had always been Christians, and probably either Catholics or Episcopalians."

"On account of the cross on the mantel-piece in our room, I suppose," said Mrs. Aleshine. "But whether they 're given to idols or prayer-books, I know they 've got a mighty nice house; and considerin' the distance from stores, there 's a good deal more in that pantry than you 'd expect to find in any house I know of, when the family is away."

"It is my opinion," said I, "that this house belongs to some rich man, probably an American

or European merchant, who lives on one of the large islands, not far away, and who uses this as a sort of summer residence."

"I thought it was always summer in this part of the world," said Mrs. Lecks.

"So it is in effect," I replied, "but there are some seasons when it is very unpleasant to remain in one of those towns which are found on the larger islands, and so the owner of this house may come up here sometimes for fresh sea air."

"Or it's just as like," said Mrs. Aleshine, "that he lives somewhere up in the iceberg regions, and comes here to spend his winters. It would do just as well. But, whichever way it is, I can't help thinkin' it's careless not to leave somebody in the house to take care of it. Why, for all the family would know about it, tramps might break in and stay as long as they like."

"That's just what's happenin' now," said Mrs. Lecks, "and for my part I ain't goin' to find no fault. I don't suppose the people would have been so hard-hearted as to turn us away from their doors, but I've seen enough of folks in this world not to be too sure about that."

"How do you suppose," said Mrs. Aleshine, addressing me, "that the family gets here and goes back? Do they keep a private steamboat?"

"Of course they have a private vessel of some kind," I answered, "probably a yacht. It is quite certain that ordinary steamers never touch here."

"If that's the case," said Mrs. Lecks, "all we can do is to wait here till they come, and get them to send us away in their ship. But whether they've just gone or are just a-comin' back depends, I suppose, on whether they live in a freezin' or a burnin' country; and if they don't like our bein' here when they come back, there's one thing they can make up their minds to, and that is that I'm never goin' to leave this place on a life-preserver."

"Nor me nuther," said Mrs. Aleshine, finishing, with much complacency, her third cup of tea.

When breakfast was over, Mrs. Lecks pushed back her chair, but did not immediately rise. With an expression of severe thought upon her face, she gazed steadfastly before her for a minute, and then she addressed Mrs. Aleshine, who had begun to gather together the cups and the plates. "Now, Barb'ry Aleshine," said she, "don't you begin to clear off the table, nor touch a single thing to wash it up, till we've been over this house. I want to do it now, before Mr. Craig goes out to prospect around and see what else is on the island, which, I suppose, he'll be wantin' to do."

I replied that I had that intention, but I was quite willing to go over the house first.

"It's come to me," said Mrs. Lecks, speaking very gravely, "that it's no use for us to talk of the family bein' here or bein' there, till we've gone over this house. If we find that they have, as far as we know, gone away in good health and spirits, that's all well enough; but if anythin's happened in this house, I don't want to be here with what's happened — at least without knowin' it; and when we do go over the house, I want a man to go with us."

"If you 'd talked that way last night, Mrs. Lecks," exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, "I'd never slept till after sun-up, and then got up and gone huntin' round among them frocks and petticoats to find somethin' that would fit me, with the quiet pulse I did have, Mrs. Lecks!"

To this remark Mrs. Lecks made no reply, but, rising, she led the way out of the kitchen and into the house.

The rooms on the first floor were very well furnished. There was a large parlor, and back of it a study or library, while, on the other side of the hall, was a dining-room, and an apartment probably used as a family room. We found nothing in these which would indicate that any-

thing untoward had happened in them. Then we went upstairs, I leading the way, Mrs. Lecks following, and Mrs. Aleshine in the rear. We first entered one of the front chambers, which was quite dark, but Mrs. Lecks unfastened and threw open a shutter. Then, with a rigid countenance and determined mien, she examined every part of the room, looked into every closet, and even under the bed. It was quite plain that it was in one of the chambers that she expected to find what had happened, if anything had happened.

The room on the other side of the hall was very like the one we first examined, except that it had two beds in it. We next visited the chamber recently occupied by my two companions, which was now undergoing the process of "airing."

"We need n't stop here," remarked Mrs. Aleshine. But Mrs. Lecks instantly replied, "Indeed, we will stop; I'm goin' to look under the bed."

"Merciful me!" exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, putting her hand on her friend's shoulder. "Supposin' you should find somethin', and we sleepin' here last night! It curdles me to think of it!"

"It's my duty," said Mrs. Lecks severely, "and I shall do it."

And do it she did, rising from the task with a sigh of relief.

My room was subjected to the same scrutiny as the others; and then we visited some smaller rooms at the extreme back of the house, which we had not before noticed. A garret, or loft, was reached by a steep stairway in one of these rooms, and into its dusky gloom I ventured by myself.

"Now, don't come down, Mr. Craig," said Mrs. Lecks, "till you're sure there's nothin' there. Of all places in the house that cock-loft, after all, is the most likely."

I had none of the fears which seemed to actuate the two women, but I had a very unpleasant time of it, groping about in the darkness and heat, and, as the place was only partly floored, running the continual risk of crashing down through the lath and plaster. I made myself quite sure, however, that nothing had happened in that loft unless some one had suffocated there, and had dried up and become the dust which I raised at every step.

"Now, then," said Mrs. Lecks, when I descended, "as there is no cellar, we'll go wash up the breakfast things; and if you want to take a walk, to see if there's any genuwine heathens or anybody else a-livin' in this island, we're not afraid to be left alone."

For the whole of the rest of the morning I wandered about the island. I investigated the paths

that I had before noticed, and found that each of them led, after a moderate walk, to some wide and pleasant part of the beach. At one of these points I found a rustic bench ; and, stuffed in between two of the slats which formed the seat, I found a book. It had been sadly wet and discolored by rain, and dried and curled up by the wind and sun. I pulled it out and found it to be a novel in French. On one of the fly-leaves was written "Emily." Reasoning from the dilapidated appearance of this book, I began to believe that the family must have left this place some time ago, and that, therefore, their return might be expected at a proportionately early period. On second thoughts, however, I considered that the state of this book was of little value as testimony. A few hours of storm, wind, and sun might have inflicted all the damage it had sustained. The two women would be better able to judge by the state of the house and the condition of the provisions how long the family had been away.

I now started out on a walk along the beach, and in little more than an hour I had gone entirely around the island. Nowhere did I see any sign of habitation or occupation, except at the house which had given us shelter, nor any opening through the surrounding reef, ex-

cept the barred passage-way through which we had come.

When I returned to the house, I found that Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine had been hard at work all the morning. They had, so to speak, gone regularly and systematically to housekeeping, and had already divided the labors of the establishment between them. Mrs. Aleshine, who prided herself on her skill in culinary matters, was to take charge of the cooking, while Mrs. Lecks assumed the care of the various rooms and the general management of the household. This arrangement was explained to me at length; and when I remarked that all this seemed to indicate that they expected to remain here for a long time, Mrs. Lecks replied :

“In my part of the country I could tell pretty close, by the dust on the tables and on the top of the pianner, how long a family has been out of a house; but dust in Pennsylvania and dust on a sea island, where there ’s no wagons nor carriages, is quite different. This house has been left in very good order, and though the windows wants washin’, and the floors and stairs brushin’—which will be easy considerin’ that none of ’em has carpets—and everything in the house a reg’lar cleanin’ up and airin’, it may be that the family

has n't been gone away very long, and so it may be a good while before they come back again. Mrs. Aleshine and me has talked it all over, and we've made up our minds that the right thing to do is just to go along and attend to things as if we was a-going to stay here for a month or two; and it may be even longer than that before the people come back. And I don't think they'll have anything to complain of when they find their house in apple-pie order, their windows washed, their floors clean, and not a speck of dust anywhere."

"For my part," said Mrs. Aleshine, "I don't see what they've got to find fault with, anyway. I look on this as part of the passage. To be sure, we ain't movin' a bit on our way to Japan, but that's not my fault, nor yet yours, Mrs. Lecks, nor yours, Mr. Craig. We paid our passage to go to Japan, and if the ship was steered wrong and got sunk, we had n't anything to do with it. We did n't want to come here, but here we are, and I'd like to know who's got any right to find fault with us."

"And bein' here," said Mrs. Lecks, "we'll take care of the things."

"As far as I'm concerned," added Mrs. Aleshine, "if this island was movin' on to Japan, I'd

a great deal rather be on it than on that ship, where, to my way of thinkin', they did n't know much more about housekeepin' than they did about steerin'."

"I think your plans and arrangements are very good," I said. "But how about the provisions? Are there enough to hold out for any time?"

"There's pretty nigh a barrel of flour," said Mrs. Aleshine, "a good deal of tea and coffee and sugar, and lots of things in tins and jars. There's a kind of cellar outside where they keep things cool, and there's more than half a keg of butter down there. It's too strong to use, but I can take that butter and wash it out, and work it over, and salt it, and make it just as good butter as any we got on board the ship."

"But," said I, "you have given me nothing to do. I shall not be content to stand about idle and see you do all the work."

"There's nothin' in the house," said Mrs. Lecks, "which you need put your hand to; but, if you choose to go out into that garden, and see if there's anything can be done in it, or got out of it,—that is, if you know anything about garden work,—I'm sure we'd be very glad of any fresh vegetables we could get."

I replied that I had been accustomed to garden work in an amateur way, and would be glad to do anything that was possible in that direction.

"I never seed into that garden," said Mrs. Aleshine, "but of all the foolish things that ever came under my eye, the buildin' a wall around a garden, when a pale fence would do just as well, is the foolishhest."

I explained that in these countries it was the fashion to use walls instead of fences.

"If it 's the fashion," said Mrs. Aleshine, "I suppose there 's no use sayin' anything agin it; but if the fashion should happen to change, they 'd find it a good deal easier to take down a barbed-wire fence than a stone wall."

This conversation took place in the large lower hall, which Mrs. Lecks had been "putting to rights," and where Mrs. Aleshine had just entered from the kitchen. Mrs. Lecks now sat down upon a chair, and, dust-cloth in hand, she thus addressed me:

"There 's another thing, Mr. Craig, that me and Mrs. Aleshine has been talkin' about. We have n't made up our minds about it, because we did n't think it was fair and right to do that before speakin' to you, and hearin' what you had to say on one side or another of it. Mrs. Aleshine

and me has had to bow our heads to afflictions, and to walkin' sometimes in roads we did n't want to, but we 've remembered the ways in which we was brought up, and have kept in them as far as we 've been able. When our husbands died, leavin' Mrs. Aleshine with a son and me without any, which, perhaps, is just as well, for there 's no knowin' how he might have turned out——”

“That 's so,” interrupted Mrs. Aleshine, “for he might have gone as a clerk to Roosher, and then you and me would 'a' had to travel different ways.”

“And when our husbands died,” continued Mrs. Leeks, “they left us enough, and plenty, to live on, and we was n't the women to forget them and their ways of thinkin', any more than we 'd forget the ways of our fathers and mothers before us.”

“That 's so!” said Mrs. Aleshine fervently.

“And now, Mr. Craig,” continued Mrs. Leeks, “we don't know how you 've been brought up, nor anything about you, in fact, except that you 've been as kind to us as if you was some sort of kin, and that we never would have thought of comin' here without you; and so me and Mrs. Aleshine has agreed to leave this whole matter to you, and to do just as you say. When us two started out on this long journey, we did n't expect to find it

what you call the path of roses, and, dear only knows, we have n't found it so."

"That 's true!" ejaculated Mrs. Aleshine.

"And what we 've had to put up with," continued Mrs. Lecks, "we have put up with. And so, Mr. Craig, whether you say dinner in the middle of the day at twelve, as we 've always been used to, or at six o'clock in the afternoon, as they had it on board that ship,—and how people ever come to turn their meals hind part foremost in that way, I can't say,—we are going to do it; and if you 've been brought up to six o'clock, you won't hear no complainin' from us, think what we may."

I was on the point of laughing aloud at the conclusion of this speech, but a glance at the serious faces of the two women, who, with so much earnest solicitude, awaited my reply, stopped me, and I hastened to assure them that dinner in the middle of the day would be entirely in accordance with my every wish.

"Good!" exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, her eyes sparkling amid the plumpness of her face, while an expression of calm relief passed over the features of Mrs. Lecks.

"And now I 'll be off and get us somethin' to eat in less than no time," said Mrs. Aleshine. "We did n't know whether to make it lunch or dinner

till we had seen you; so you can't expect much to-day, but to-morrow we'll begin, and have everything straight and comfortable. I'm goin' to get up early in the mornin' and bake a batch of bread; and you need n't be afraid, Mr. Craig, but what I'll have you a bit of hot meat every night for your supper."

In the afternoon we all visited the garden, which, although a good deal overgrown with luxuriant weeds, showed marks of fair cultivation. Some of the beds had been cleared out and left to the weeds, and we found some "garden truck," as my companions called it, with which we were not familiar. But there were tomato vines loaded with fruit, plenty of beans of various kinds, and a large patch of potatoes, many of which had been dug.

From the lower end of the garden Mrs. Ale-shine gave a shout of delight. We went to her, and found her standing before a long asparagus bed.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "If there's anything that settles it firm in my mind that these people is Christians, it's this bed of grass. I don't believe there ever was heathens that growed grass."

"I thought that was all settled when we found the bakin' powders," said Mrs. Lecks.

"But this clinches it," answered her companion. "I can't tell from a sparrowgrass bed what church they belong to, but they 're no idolaters."

The next morning I delivered to the genial Mrs. Aleshine a large basket full of fresh vegetables, and we had a most excellent dinner. Somewhat to my surprise, the table was not set in the kitchen, but in the dining-room.

"Me and Mrs. Aleshine have made up our minds," said Mrs. Lecks, in explanation, "that it 's not the proper thing for you to be eatin' in the kitchen, nor for us neither. Here's table-cloths, and good glass and china, and spoons and forks, which, although they 're not solid silver, are plated good enough for anybody. Neither you nor us is servants, and a kitchen is no place for us."

"That 's so!" said Mrs. Aleshine. "We paid our money for first-class passages, and it was understood that we 'd have everything as good as anybody."

"Which I don't see as that has anything to do with it, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "for the steamship people don't generally throw in desert islands as part of the accommodation."

"We did n't ask for the island," retorted Mrs. Aleshine, "and if they 'd steered the ship right, we should n't have wanted it."

When we had finished our dinner, Mrs. Lecks pushed back her chair, and sat for a few moments in thought, as was her wont before saying anything of importance.

“There’s another thing,” said she, “that I’ve been thinkin’ about, though I have n’t spoke of it yet, even to Mrs. Aleshine. We have n’t no right to come here and eat up the victuals and use the things of the people that own this house, without paying for them. Of course, we’re not goin’ to sleep on the bare ground and starve to death while there’s beds and food close to our hands. But if we use ’em and take it, we ought to pay the people that the place belongs to — that is, if we’ve got the money to do it with; and Mrs. Aleshine and me has got the money. When we went down into our cabin to get ready to leave the ship, the first thing we did was to put our purses in our pockets, and we’ve both got drafts wrapped up in oil silk, and sewed inside our frock-bodies; and if you did n’t think to bring your money along with you, Mr. Craig, we can lend you all you need.”

I thanked her for her offer, but stated that I had brought with me all my money.

“Now,” continued Mrs. Lecks, “it’s my opinion that we ought to pay our board regular every

week. I don't know what is commonly charged in a place like this, but I know you can get very good board where I come from for six dollars a week."

"That is for two in a room," said Mrs. Aleshine; "but havin' a room to himself would make it more for Mr. Craig."

"It ain't his fault," said Mrs. Lecks, somewhat severely, "that he ain't got a brother or some friend to take part of the room and pay part of the expense. But, anyway, the room is n't a large one, and I don't think he ought to pay much more for havin' a room to himself. Seven dollars is quite enough."

"But then you 've got to consider," said Mrs. Aleshine, "that we do the cookin' and housework, and that ought to be counted."

"I was comin' to that," said Mrs. Lecks. "Now, if me and Mrs. Aleshine was to go out to service, which you may be sure we would n't do unless circumstances was very different from what they are now ——"

"That 's true!" earnestly ejaculated Mrs. Aleshine.

"But if we was to do it," continued Mrs. Lecks, "we would n't go into anybody's family for less than two dollars a week. Now, I 've always heard

that wages is low in this part of the world, and the work is n't heavy for two of us; and so, considering the family is n't here to make their own bargain, I think we 'd better put our wages at that, so that 'll make four dollars a week for each of us two to pay."

"But how about Mr. Craig?" said Mrs. Aleshine. "He ought n't to work in that garden for nothin'."

"Fifty cents a day," said Mrs. Lecks, "is as little as any man would work for, and then it ought n't to take all his time. That will make three dollars to take out of Mr. Craig's board, and leave it four dollars a week, the same as ours."

I declared myself perfectly satisfied with these arrangements, but Mrs. Aleshine did not seem to be altogether convinced that they were just.

"When a woman goes out to service," said she, "she gets her board and is paid wages besides, and it's the same for gardeners."

"Then I suppose, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "that we ought to charge these people with our wages, and make 'em pay it when they come back!"

This remark apparently disposed of Mrs. Aleshine's objections, and her friend continued: "There 's a jar on the mantel-piece there, of

the kind the East Indy ginger comes in. It 's got nothin' in it now but some brown paper, in which fish-hooks is wrapped. We came here on a Wednesday, and so every Tuesday night we 'll each put four dollars in that jar, under the fish-hook paper; and then if, by night or by day, the family comes back and makes a fuss about our bein' here, all we have to say is, 'The board money's in the ginger-jar,' and our consciences is free."

Mrs. Lecks's plan was adopted as a very just and proper one, and at the expiration of the week we each deposited four dollars in the ginger-jar.

While occupying this house I do not think that any of us endeavored to pry into the private concerns of the family who owned it, although we each had a very natural curiosity to know something about said family. Opportunities of acquiring such knowledge, however, were exceedingly scarce. Even if we had been willing to look into such receptacles, the several desks and secretaries that the house contained were all locked; and nowhere could Mrs. Lecks or Mrs. Aleshine find an old letter or piece of wrapping-paper with an address on it. I explained to my companions that letters and packages were not likely to come to a place like this, but they kept a sharp lookout for

anything of the kind, asserting that there could be no possible harm in reading the names of the people whose house they were in.

In some of the books in the library, which were English and French in about equal proportions, with a few volumes in German, I found written on the blank pages the names "Emily" and "Lucille," and across the title-pages of some French histories was inscribed, in a man's hand, "A. Dusante." We discussed these names, but could not make up our minds whether the family was French or English. For instance, there was no reason why an English woman might not be called Lucille, and even such a surname as Dusante was not uncommon either among English or Americans. The labels on the boxes and tins of provisions showed that most of them came from San Francisco, but this was likely to be the case, no matter what the nationality of the family.

The question of the relationship of the three persons, of whose existence we had discovered traces, was a very interesting one to Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine.

"I can't make up my mind," said the latter, "whether Emily is the mother of Lucille or her daughter, or whether they are both children of Mr. Dusante, or whether he's married to Lucille

and Emily is his sister-in-law, or whether she's his sister and not hers, or whether he's the uncle and they're his nieces, or whether Emily is an old lady and Mr. Dusante and Lucille are both her children, or whether they are two maiden ladies and Mr. Dusante is their brother, or whether Mr. Dusante is only a friend of the family, and boards here because no two women ought to live in such a lonely place without a man in the house."

"Well," said Mrs. Lecks, "whether Mr. Dusante comes back with two nieces, or a wife and daughter, or Mrs. Dusante and a mother-in-law, or a pair of sisters, all we've got to say is, 'The board money's in the ginger-jar,' and let them do their worst."

In my capacity as gardener I do not think I earned the wages which my companions had allotted to me, for I merely gathered and brought in such fruits and vegetables as I found in proper condition for use. In other ways, however, I made my services valuable to our little family. In a closet in my chamber I found guns and ammunition, and I was frequently able to bring in a few birds. Some of these were pronounced by Mrs. Aleshine unsuitable for the table, but others she cooked with much skill, and they were found to be very good eating.

Not far from the little wharf which has been mentioned there stood, concealed by a mass of low-growing palms, a boat-house in which was a little skiff hung up near the roof. This I let down and launched, and found great pleasure in rowing it about the lagoon. There was fishing-tackle in the boat-house, which I used with success, the lagoon abounding in fish. Offerings of this kind were much more acceptable to Mrs. Aleshine than birds.

"There's some kinds of fishes that's better than others," said she, "but, as a gen'ral rule, a fish is a fish, and if you catch 'em you can eat 'em; but it's a very different thing with birds. When you've never seen 'em before, how are you goin' to tell but what they're some kin to an owl, a pigeon-hawk, or a crow? And if I once get it into my head that there's any of that kind of family blood in 'em, they disagree with me just the same as if there really was."

One afternoon, as I was returning in the boat from the point on the other side of the island, where I had found the rustic seat and Emily's book, I was surprised to see Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine standing on the end of the little wharf. This was an unusual thing for them to do, as they were very industrious women, and seldom had an idle moment; and it seemed to be one of their

greatest pleasures to discuss the work they were going to do when they had finished that on which they were then engaged. I was curious, therefore, to know why they should be standing thus idly on the wharf, and pulled towards them as rapidly as possible.

When I had rowed near enough to hear them, Mrs. Aleshine remarked with cheerful placidity:

“The Dusantes are coming.”

The tide was quite low, and I could not see over the reef; but in a few moments I had grounded the skiff and had sprung upon the wharf. Out on the ocean, about a mile away, I saw a boat, apparently a large one, approaching the island.

“Now, then, Barb’ry Aleshine,” said Mrs. Lecks, “you’ll soon see whether it’s his two nieces, or his daughters, or his wife and sister-in-law, or whatever of them other relationships which you’ve got so pat.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Aleshine, “but what’s more, we’ll find out if he’s going to be satisfied with the board money we’ve put in the ginger-jar.”

PART III

WHEN the boat which we saw approaching the island had come near enough for us to distinguish its occupants, we found that it contained five persons. Three sat in the stern, and two were rowing. Of those in the stern, we soon made out one to be a woman; and, after putting our eyesight to its very best efforts, we were obliged to admit that there was only one female on board.

“Now, that ’s disapp’intin’,” said Mrs. Aleshine, “for I ’ve wondered and wondered which I should like best, Emily or Lucille; and now that only one of them has come, of course I can’t tell.”

The boat came on, almost directly towards the passage-way in the reef, and it was not long before the two women had been able to decide that Mr. Dusante was an elderly man, and that the lady was moderately young, and in all probability his daughter.

"It may be," said Mrs. Aleshine, "that the mother, whether she was Emily, or whether she was Lucille, has died, and for that reason they are comin' back sooner than they expected."

"Well, I hope you 're wrong there, Barb'ry Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "for they 'll see lots of things here that will freshen up their affliction, and that won't make them any too lively people to be with."

"On the other hand," said Mrs. Aleshine, "it may be that Emily, or else Lucille, has got married, and has gone away with her husband to travel, and by the time she 's got a little baby she 'll come here to live on account of the sea air for the child; and that 'll make the house pleasant, Mrs. Lecks."

"I 'd like to know how long you expect to live here," said Mrs. Lecks, regarding her friend with some severity.

"That 's not for me to say," replied Mrs. Aleshine, "knowin' nothin' about it. But this I will say, that I hope they have brought along with them some indigo-blue, for I nearly used up all there was the last time I washed."

During this dialogue I had been thinking that it was a very strange thing for the owners of this place to visit their island in such a fashion. Why

should they be in an open boat? And where did they come from? Wherever they might live, it was not at all probable that they would choose to be rowed from that point to this. From the general character and appointments of the house in which we had found a refuge, it was quite plain that its owners were people in good circumstances, who were in the habit of attending to their domestic affairs in a very orderly and proper way. It was to be presumed that it was their custom to come here in a suitable vessel, and to bring with them the stores needed during their intended stay. Now, there was little or nothing in that boat; and, on the whole, I did not believe it contained the owners of this island.

It would not do, however, to assume anything of the kind. There might have been a disaster; in fact, I knew nothing about it; and it was my immediate duty to go and meet these people at the passage; for, if they were unable to unlock the bars, their boat could not enter, and I must ferry them across the lagoon. Without communicating my doubts to my companions, I hurried into the skiff, and pulled as far as possible into the passage through the reef. The bars, of which there were more than I at first supposed, were so

arranged that it was impossible for a boat to go in or out at any stage of the tide.

I had been there but a few minutes when the boat from without came slowly in between the rocks; and almost as soon as I saw it, its progress was suddenly stopped by a sunken bar.

"Hello!" cried several men at once.

"Hello!" cried I, in return. "Have you the key to these bars?"

A stout man with a red beard stood up in the stern. "Key?" said he, "what key?"

"Then you do not belong here?" said I. "Who are you?"

At this, the gentleman who was sitting by the lady arose to his feet. He was a man past middle age, rather tall and slim, and when he stood up the slight rolling of the boat made him stagger, and he came near falling.

"You 'd better sit down, sir," said the man with the red beard, who I saw was a sailor. "You can talk better that way."

The gentleman now seated himself, and thus addressed me:

"I am, sir, the Reverend Mr. Enderton, lately missionary to Nanfouchong, China; and this is my daughter, Miss Enderton. We are returning

to the United States by way of the Sandwich Islands, and took passage in a sailing vessel for Honolulu. About two weeks ago this vessel, in some way which I do not understand, became disabled——”

“Rotten forem’st,” interrupted the man with the red beard, “which give way in a gale; and strained and leaky besides.”

“I did not know the mast was rotten,” said the gentleman, “but, since the occasion of our first really serviceable wind, she has been making very unsatisfactory progress. And more than that, the whole force of seamen was employed night and day in endeavoring to keep the water out of the tea, thereby causing such a thumping and pounding that sleep was out of the question. Add to this the fact that our meals became very irregular, and were sometimes entirely overlooked ——”

“Prog was gettin’ mighty short,” interpolated the red-bearded man.

“You can easily discern, sir,” continued the gentleman, “that it was impossible for myself and my daughter to remain longer on that vessel, on which we were the only passengers. I therefore requested the captain to put us ashore at the nearest land, and, after more than a week of delay and demur, he consented to do so.”

"Could n't do it," said the man. "till there was land nigh enough."

"The captain informed me," continued the gentleman, "that this island was inhabited, and that I could here find shelter and repose until a vessel could be sent from Honolulu to take me off. He furnished me with this boat and three seamen, one of whom," pointing to the red-bearded man, "is a coxswain. We have been rowing ever since early this morning, with but a very moderate quantity of food and much discomfort. Now, sir, you have heard my story; and I ask you, as one man to another, if you still intend to bar your water-gates against us?"

"I did not bar the gates," I said, "and I would gladly unlock them if I could. I belong to a shipwrecked party who took refuge here some two weeks ago."

"And how did you get in?" hastily inquired the red-bearded coxswain.

"Our boat sunk when we were within sight of the island, and we came here on life-preservers, and so got under the bars."

The two men who had been rowing now turned suddenly and looked at me. They both had black beards, and they both exclaimed at the same moment, "By George!"

"I won't stop here to tell any more of our story," said I. "The great point now is to get you all ashore, and have you cared for."

"That's so!" said the coxswain. And the two sailors murmured, "Ay, ay, sir."

The bar which stopped the progress of the larger boat was just under the surface of the water, while another a foot above the water kept my skiff about six feet distant from the other boat. There was some loose flooring in the bottom of the coxswain's boat, and he ordered two of the boards taken out, and with them a bridge was made, one end resting on the bow of the larger boat, and the other on the iron bar by my skiff.

"Now," said the coxswain, "let the lady go first."

The elderly gentleman arose, as if he would prefer to take the lead; but his daughter, who had not yet spoken a word, was passed forward by the coxswain, steadied over the bridge by one of the sailors, and assisted by me into the skiff. Then her father came aboard, and I rowed with them to the wharf.

Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine came forward most cordially to meet them.

"Mr. Dusante, I suppose?" said Mrs. Lecks. And Mrs. Aleshine hurriedly whispered in my ear, "Is it Lucille or Emily?"

As quickly as possible I explained the situation. For a few moments Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine stood speechless. Nothing which had happened to them, the wreck of the steamer, the sinking of the boat, or our experience with life-preservers, affected them so much as this disappointment in regard to the problem of the Dusante family. Travel by sea was all novel and strange to them, and they had expected all sorts of things to which they were not accustomed; but they had never imagined that Fate would be so hard upon them as to snatch away the solution of this mystery, just as they were about to put their hands upon it. But, in spite of this sudden blow, the two good women quickly recovered themselves, and with hearty and kindly words hurried the missionary and his daughter to the house, while I went to bring over the men.

I found the three sailors busy in securing their boat so that it would not be injured by the rocks during the rising and falling of the tide. When they had finished this job, they had to do a good deal of scrambling before they reached my skiff.

"We thought at first, sir," said the coxswain, as I rowed them across the lagoon, "that it was all gammon about your not livin' here and havin' no keys to them bars; but we've come to the 'pinion

that if you 'd been able to unlock 'em you 'd have done it, sooner than take all this trouble."

I now related my story more fully, and the men were greatly astonished when they heard that my companions in this adventure were two women. Upon my asking the coxswain why he had come to this island, he replied that his captain had heard that people lived on it, although he knew nothing about them; and that, as it would be almost impossible to get his brig here with the wind that was then prevailing, and as he did not wish to go out of his course anyway, he made up his mind that he would rather lose the services of three men than keep that missionary on board a day longer.

"You see, sir," said the coxswain, as we went ashore, "the parson would n't never take it into account that we were short of prog, and leakin' like Sam Hill; and because things were uncomfortable he growled up and he growled down, till he was wuss for the spirits of the men than the salt water comin' in, or the hard-tack givin' out, and there was danger if he was n't got rid of that he'd be pitched overboard and left to take his chances for a whale. And then, by sendin' us along, that give the crew three half rations a day

extry, and that 'll count for a good deal in the fix they 're in."

When I reached the house, I took the men into the kitchen, where Mrs. Aleshine already had the table spread. There were bread and cold meat, while the tea-kettle steamed by the fire. In a very short time three happy mariners sat round that table, while Mrs. Aleshine, with beaming face, attended to their wants, and plied them with innumerable questions. They had not finished eating when Mrs. Lecks entered the kitchen.

"I put that minister and his daughter in the two front bedrooms," said she to me, after hospitably greeting the three men, "which me and Mrs. Aleshine had run and got ready for the Dusantes, as soon as you went in your boat to meet 'em. The young lady was mighty nigh worn out, and glad enough of the tea and things, and to get into bed. But the gentleman, he wanted a soft-boiled egg, and when I told him I had n't come across no hen-house yet on this island, he looked at me as if he did n't half believe me, and thought I was keepin' the eggs to sell."

"Which it would be ridiculous to do," said Mrs. Aleshine, "in the middle of an ocean like this."

"If he lets you off with soft-b'iled eggs, ma'am," said the coxswain very respectfully, "I think you may bless your stars."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the two sailors with black beards.

Miss Ruth Enderton and her father did not make their appearance until the next morning at breakfast-time. I found the young lady a very pleasant person. She was rather slight in figure, inclined to be pretty, and was what might be called a warm-colored blonde. Her disposition was quite sociable, and she almost immediately stepped into the favor of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine.

Mr. Enderton, however, was a person of another sort. He was a prim and somewhat formal man, and appeared to be entirely self-engrossed, with very vague notions in regard to his surroundings. He was not by any means an ill-tempered man, being rather inclined to be placid than otherwise; but he gave so little attention to circumstances and events that he did not appear to understand why he should be incommoded by the happenings of life. I have no doubt that he made existence on board the disabled brig a hundred times more unsatisfactory than it would otherwise have been. With his present condition he seemed very well satisfied, and it was quite plain

that he looked upon Mrs. Lecks, Mrs. Aleshine, and myself as the proprietors of the establishment, having forgotten, or paid no attention to, my statement in regard to our coming here.

As soon as she thought it fit and proper, and this moment arrived in the course of the first forenoon, Mrs. Lecks spoke to Mr. Enderton on the subject of the board which should be paid to the Dusantes. She stated the arrangements we had made in the matter, and then told him that as he and his daughter had the best accommodations in the house, each occupying a large, handsome room, she thought that he should pay fifteen dollars a week for the two.

“Now, if your daughter,” she continued, “can do anythin’ about the house which will be of real help, though for the life of me I don’t see what she can find to do, with me and Mrs. Aleshine here, somethin’ might be took off on account of her services; but of course you, sir, can’t do nothin’, unless you was to preach on Sundays; and not knowin’ what denomination the Dusantes belong to, it would n’t be fair to take their money to pay for the preachin’ of doctrines which, perhaps, they don’t believe in.”

This financial proposal aroused Mr. Enderton’s opposition. “When I came here, madam,” he

said, "I did not expect to pay any board whatever; and I think, moreover, that your rates are exorbitant. In Nanfouchong, if I remember rightly, the best of board did not cost more than two or three dollars a week."

"I don't want to say anythin', sir," said Mrs. Lecks, "which might look disrespectful, but as long as I've got a conscience inside of me I'm not goin' to stay here and see the Dusantes lose money by Chinese cheapness."

"I don't know anything about the Dusantes," said Mr. Enderton, "but I am not going to pay fifteen dollars a week for board for myself and daughter."

The discussion lasted for some time with considerable warmth on each side, and was at last ended by Mr. Enderton agreeing to pay board at the same rate as the two women and myself, and each week to deposit in the ginger-jar eight dollars for himself and daughter.

"You may not care to remember, sir," said Mrs. Lecks, with cold severity, "that Mr. Craig, and me, and Mrs. Aleshine puts in services besides, although, to be sure, they don't go into the jar."

"I only remember," said Mr. Enderton, "that I am paying an unjustifiable price as it is."

Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine, however, were not at all of this opinion, and they agreed that, if it should be in their power, they would see to it that the Dusantes lost nothing by this close-fisted missionary.

After dinner — and I may remark that the newcomers were not consulted in regard to the hours for meals — Mrs. Lecks had an interview with the coxswain on the subject of board for himself and his two companions. This affair, however, was very quickly settled, for the three mariners had among them only one dollar and forty-three cents, and this, the coxswain explained, they would like to keep for tobacco. It was therefore settled that, as the three sailors could pay no money, as much work as possible should be got out of them; and to this plan they agreed heartily and cheerfully.

“There ’s only one thing we ’ll ask, ma’am,” said the coxswain to Mrs. Lecks, “and that is that we be put in a different mess from the parson. We’ve now eat two meals with the passengers, and me and my mates is agreed that that ’s about as much as we can go.”

After this, therefore, the three men had their meals in the kitchen, where they were generally joined by Mrs. Aleshine, who much delighted in their company. But she made it a point some-

times to sit down with us in the dining-room, merely to show that she had as much right there as anybody.

“As to the work for them sailor men,” said Mrs. Aleshine, “I don’t see what they ’re goin’ to do. Of course they don’t know nothin’ about gardenin’, and it seems to me that the best thing to be done is to put ’em to fishin’.”

Mrs. Lecks considered this a good suggestion, and accordingly the coxswain and his companions were told that thereafter they would be expected to fish for eight hours a day, Sundays excepted. This plan, however, did not work very well. During the first two days the sailors caught so many fish, that although the fishermen themselves had excellent appetites for such food, it was found utterly impossible to consume what they brought in. Consequently, it was ordered that thereafter they should catch only as many fish as should be needed, and then make themselves useful by assisting Mrs. Aleshine and Mrs. Lecks in any manner they might direct.

I found it quite easy to become acquainted with Miss Ruth Enderton, as she was very much inclined to conversation. “It ’s ever so long,” she said, “since I ’ve had anybody to talk to.”

She had left the United States when she was quite a little girl, and had since seen nothing of her native land. She was, consequently, full of questions about America, although quite willing to talk of her life in China. Society, at least such kind as she had ever cared for, had been extremely scarce in the little missionary station at which she had lived so long; and now, coming from a wearisome sojourn on a disabled sailing vessel, with no company but the crew and a pre-occupied father, she naturally was delighted to get among people she could talk to. With Mrs. Lecks, Mrs. Aleshine, and myself she soon became very friendly, and showed herself to be a most lively and interesting young person.

I did all that I could to make Miss Ruth's time pass agreeably. I rowed with her on the lagoon, taught her to fish, and showed her all the pleasant points on the island which could be easily reached by walking. Mr. Enderton gave us very little of his company, for, having discovered that there was a library in the house, he passed most of his time in that room.

"You have made a very fair selection of books, sir," he remarked to me, "but it may readily be conceived, from the character of the works, that your tastes are neither ecclesiastic nor scientific."

Several times I explained to him the ownership of the library and the house, but he immediately forgot what I had said, or paid no attention to it. When he paid his board at the end of the week, he handed the money to Mrs. Lecks; and although before his eyes, she put it into the ginger-jar, beneath the paper of fish-hooks, I know very well that he considered he was paying it to her for her own use and behoof. He was comfortably lodged, he had all that he needed—and very nearly all that he wanted—to eat; and I do not know that I ever saw a man more contented with his lot.

As for the coxswain and the two sailors, they had a very pleasant time of it, but Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine would not think of such a thing as allowing them to eat in idleness the bread of the *Dusantes*. After they had been with us a few days, Mrs. Lecks told me that she thought she could show the coxswain and his mates how to dig and gather the garden stuff which was daily needed.

“To be sure,” said she, “that work goes agin part of your board, but fishin’ and bringin’ in firewood don’t take up quarter of the time of them sailors; and so that the garden work is done, I don’t suppose it matters to the *Dusantes* who does it. And that’ll give you more time to make things

pleasant for Miss Ruth; for, as far as I can see, there is n't a thing for her to do even if she knows how to do it."

The three mariners were more than willing to do anything desired by Mrs. Lecks or Mrs. Aleshine, to whom they looked up with great admiration and respect. The latter was their favorite, not only because she was with them a great deal during their meals and at other times, but because of her genial nature and easy sociability. The men were always trying to lighten her labors, and to do something that would please her.

One of them climbed to the top of what she called a "palm-leaf-fan tree," and brought therefrom some broad leaves which he cut and trimmed, and sewed in true nautical fashion, until he made some fans which were heavy and clumsy, but, as he said, they would stand half a gale of wind if she chose to raise it. The coxswain caught or trapped two sea-birds, and having clipped their wings, he spent days in endeavoring to tame them, hoping to induce them, as far as the power in them lay, to take the place of the barn-yard fowls whose absence Mrs. Aleshine continually deplored. Every evening, the two black-bearded sailors would dance hornpipes for her, much to her diversion and delight.

"I've often heard," she remarked, "that in these hot cocoanut countries the tricks of the monkeys was enough to keep everybody on a steady laugh, but I'm sure sailor men is a great deal better. When you get tired of their pranks and their tomfooleries you can tell 'em to stop, which with monkeys you can't."

It was about ten days after the arrival of the missionary's party that, as I was going to get ready the boat in which Miss Ruth and myself generally rowed in the cool of the evening, I saw Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine sitting on the beach in the shade of some low-growing trees. They were evidently waiting for me, and as soon as I appeared Mrs. Lecks beckoned to me; whereupon I joined them.

"Sit down," said Mrs. Lecks, "there's somethin' I want to talk to you about. Mrs. Aleshine and me have made up our minds that you ought to be hurried up a little about poppin' the question to Miss Ruth."

This remark astounded me. "Popping the question!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Lecks, "and me and Mrs. Aleshine know very well that you have n't done it yet; for both of us havin' been through that sort of thing ourselves, we know the signs of it after it has happened."

"And we would n't say nothin' to hurry you," added Mrs. Aleshine, "if it was nt' that the groceries, especially the flour, is a-gettin' low. We've been talkin' to them sailor men, and they're pretty well agreed that there's no use now in expectin' their captain to send for 'em; for, if he was a-goin' to do it at all, he'd 'a' done it before this. And perhaps he never got nowhere himself, in which case he could n't. And they say the best thing we can all do when the victuals has nearly give out, provided the Dusantes don't come back in time, is to take what's left, and all get into their big boat, and row away to that island, which I don't know just how far it is, that the captain of our ship was going to. There we can stay pretty comfortable till a ship comes along and takes us off."

"But what has all that to do," I asked, "with Miss Ruth and me?"

"Do?" cried Mrs. Lecks; "it has everythin' to do. When it's all settled and fixed between you and Miss Ruth, there'll be nothin' to hinder us from gettin' ready to start when we please."

"But, my dear friends," I said with much earnestness, "I have not the slightest idea of proposing to Miss Enderton."

"That's just what I said to Mrs. Aleshine," said Mrs. Lecks, "and that's the reason we let our irons

cool, and come out here to talk to you. It's just like a young man to keep puttin' off that sort of thing; but this can't be put off."

"That's so!" cried Mrs. Aleshine; "and I'll just let you see how the matter stands. There is house-keepers who allows a pint of flour a day to each person, but this is for farm hands and people who works hard and eats hearty; and I've found that three-quarters of a pint will do very well if the dough is kneaded conscientious and made up light, so that it 'll rise well when it's put into the oven. Now I've measured all the flour that's left, and me and Mrs. Lecks, we've calculated that, allowin' three-quarters of a pint of flour a day to each one of us, there's just eight days more that we can stay here—that is, if the Dusantes don't come back before that time, which, of course, can't be counted on. So you can see for yourself, Mr. Craig, there's no time to be lost, even considerin' that she has n't to make up anythin' to be married in."

"No," said Mrs. Lecks; "just for us and three sailors, that would n't be needed."

I looked from one to the other in dumb astonishment. Mrs. Lecks gave me no time to say anything.

"In common cases," said she, "this might all be put off till we got somewhere; but it won't do

now. Here you are, with everythin' in your own hands; but just get away from here, and there 's an end of that. She 's as pretty a girl as you 'll see in a month of Sundays; and if she leaves here without your gettin' her, there 's no knowin' who 'll snap her up. When we 've got to that island, you may see her once a week, but maybe you won't. She may go away in one ship and you in another, and there may be somebody right there, a missionary, for all I know, who 'll have her before you have a chance to put in a word."

"And that 's not the worst of it," said Mrs. Aleshine. "Supposin' them Dusantes come back before we go. There 's no knowin' what that Mr. Dusante is. He may be a brother of Emily and Lucille. And what sort of chance would you have then, I 'd like to know, with Miss Ruth right here in his own house, and he ownin' the row-boat, and everythin'? Or it may be he 's a widower, and that 'll be a mighty sight worse, I can tell you."

"No matter whether they 're widowers or never been married," said Mrs. Lecks, "there 'll be plenty that 'll want her as soon as they see her; and if it is n't for the girl's own pretty face, it 'll be for her father's money."

"Her father's money!" I exclaimed. "What are you talking of?"

"There's no good tellin' me anythin' about that," said Mrs. Lecks, very decidedly. "There never was a man as close-fisted as Mr. Enderton who had n't money."

"And you know as well as we do," said Mrs. Aleshine, "that in them countries where he's been, the heathens worship idols of silver and idols of gold; and when them heathens is converted, don't you suppose the missionaries get any of that? I expect that Mr. Enderton has converted thousands of heathens."

At this suggestion I laughed outright. But Mrs. Lecks reproved me.

"Now, Mr. Craig," said she, "this is no laughin' matter. What me and Mrs. Aleshine is sayin' is for your good, and for the good of Miss Ruth along with you. I have n't much opinion of her father, but his money is as good as anybody else's, and, though they had to leave their trunks on board their ship, what little they brought with them shows that they've been used to havin' the best there is. Mrs. Aleshine and me has set up till late into the night talkin' over this thing; and we are both of one mind that you two need never expect to have the same chance again that you've

got now. The very fact that the old gentleman is a preacher, and can marry you on the spot, ought to make you tremble when you think of the risks you are runnin' by puttin' it off."

"I 've got to go into the house now to see about supper," said Mrs. Aleshine, rising; "and I hope you 'll remember, Mr. Craig, when your bread is on your plate, and Miss Ruth is sittin' opposite to you, that three-quarters of a pint of flour a day is about as little as anybody can live on, and that time is flyin'."

Mrs. Lecks now also rose. But I detained the two for a moment.

"I hope you have not said anything to Miss Enderton on this subject," I said.

"No," replied Mrs. Aleshine, "we have n't. We are both agreed that as you 're the one that's to do what's to be done, you are the one that's to be spoke to. And havin' been through it ourselves, we understand well enough that the more a woman don't know nothin' about it, the more likely she is to be ketched if she wants to be."

The two women left me in an amused but also somewhat annoyed state of mind. I had no intention whatever of proposing to Miss Ruth Enderton. She was a charming girl, very bright

and lively, and, withal, I had reason to believe, very sensible. But it was not yet a fortnight since I first saw her, and no thought of marrying her had entered into my head. Had Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine, or, more important than all, had Miss Enderton, any reason to believe that I was acting the part of a lover?

The latter portion of this question was almost immediately answered to my satisfaction by the appearance of Miss Ruth, who came skipping down to me and calling out to me in that free and hearty manner with which a woman addresses a friend or near acquaintance, but never a suspected lover. She betrayed no more notion of the Lecks and Aleshine's scheme than on the day I first met her.

But, as I was rowing her over the lagoon, I felt a certain constraint, which I had not known before. There was no ground whatever for the wild imaginings of the two women, but the fact that they had imagined it interfered very much with the careless freedom with which I had previously talked to Miss Ruth. I do not think, however, that she noticed any change in me, for she chattered and laughed, and showed, as she had done from the first, the rare delight which she took in this novel island life.

When we returned to the house, we were met by Mrs. Aleshine. "I am goin' to give you two your supper," she said, "on that table there under the tree. We all had ours a little earlier than common, as the sailor men seemed hungry; and I took your father's to him in the library, where I expect he's a-sittin' yet, holdin' a book in one hand and stirrin' his tea with the other, till he's stirred out nearly every drop on the floor, which, however, it won't matter at all, for in the mornin' I'll rub up that floor till it's as bright as new."

This plan delighted Miss Ruth, but I saw in it the beginning of the workings of a deep-laid scheme. I was just about to sit down, when Mrs. Aleshine said to me in a low voice as she left us:

"Remember that the first three-quarters of a pint apiece begins now!"

"Don't you think that Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine are perfectly charming?" said Miss Ruth, as she poured out the tea. "They always seem to be trying to think of some kind thing to do for other people."

I agreed entirely with Miss Enderton's remark, but I could not help thinking of the surprise she would feel if she knew of the kind thing that these two women were trying to do for her.

"Have you taken any steps yet?" asked Mrs. Lecks of me the next day. And on my replying that I had taken no steps of the kind to which I supposed she alluded, she walked away with a very grave and serious face.

A few hours later Mrs. Aleshine came to me. "There's another reason for hurryin' up," said she. "Them sailor men seems able to do without most anythin' in this world except tobacco, and Mrs. Lecks has been sellin' it to 'em out of a big box she found in a closet upstairs, at five cents a tea-cup full, which I think is awful cheap, but she says prices in islands is always low, and wrapping the money up in a paper, with 'Cash paid by sailor men for tobacco' written on it, and puttin' it into the ginger-jar with the board money. But their dollar and forty-three cents is nearly gone, and Mrs. Lecks she says that not a whiff of Mr. Dusanter's tobacco shall they have if they can't pay for it. And when they have nothin' to smoke, they'll be wantin' to leave this island just as quick as they can, without waitin' for the flour to give out."

Here was another pressure brought to bear upon me. Not only the waning flour, but the rapidly disappearing tobacco money was used as a weapon to urge me forward to the love-making which Mrs.

Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine had set their hearts upon.

I was in no hurry to leave the island, and hoped very much that when we did go we should depart in some craft more comfortable than a ship's boat. In order, therefore, to prevent any undue desire to leave on the part of the sailors, I gave them money enough to buy a good many teacups full of tobacco. By this act I think I wounded the feelings of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine, although I had no idea that such would be the effect of my little gift. They said nothing to me on the subject, but their looks and manner indicated that they thought I had not been acting honorably. For two days they had very little to say to me; and then Mrs. Aleshine came to me to make what, I suppose, was their supreme effort.

"Mrs. Lecks and me is a-goin' to try," she said, and as she spoke she looked at me with a very sad expression and a watery appearance about the eyes, "to stretch out the time for you a little longer. We are goin' to make them sailor men eat more fish, and as for me and her, we'll go pretty much without bread, and make it up, as well as we can, on other things. You and Miss Ruth and the parson can each have your three-quarters of a pint of flour a day, just the same as

ever, but what we save ought to give you three or four days longer."

This speech moved me deeply. I could not allow these two kind-hearted women to half starve themselves in order that I might have more time to woo, and I spoke very earnestly on the subject to Mrs. Aleshine, urging her to give up the fanciful plans which she and Mrs. Lecks had concocted.

"Let us drop this idea of love-making," I said, "which is the wildest kind of vagary, and all live happily together, as we did before. If the provisions give out before the Dusantes come back, I suppose we shall have to leave in the boat; but, until that time comes, let us enjoy life here as much as we can, and be the good friends that we used to be."

I might as well have talked to one of the palm-trees which waved over us.

"As I said before," remarked Mrs. Aleshine, "what is saved from Mrs. Lecks's and mine and the three sailor men's three-quarters of a pint apiece ought to give you four days more." And she went into the house.

All this time the Reverend Mr. Enderton had sat and read in the library, or meditatively had walked the beach with a book in his hand; while the three mariners had caught fish, performed

their other work, and lain in the shade, smoking their pipes in peace. Miss Ruth and I had taken our daily rows and walks, and had enjoyed our usual hours of pleasant converse, and all the members of the little colony seemed happy and contented except Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Alesbine. These two went gravely and sadly about their work, and the latter asked no more for the horn-pipes and the sea songs of her sailor men.

But, for some unaccountable reason, Mr. Ender-ton's condition of tranquil abstraction did not continue. He began to be fretful and discontented. He found fault with his food and his accommodations, and instead of spending the greater part of the day in the library as had been his wont, he took to wandering about the island, generally with two or three books under his arm, sometimes sitting down in one place and sometimes in another, and then rising suddenly, to go grumbling into the house.

One afternoon, as Miss Ruth and I were in the skiff in the lagoon, we saw Mr. Enderton approaching us, walking on the beach. As soon as he was near enough for us to hear him, he shouted to his daughter:

“Ruth, come out of that boat! If you want to take the air I should think you might as well walk

with me as to go rowing round with — with anybody.”

This rude and heartless speech made my blood boil, while my companion turned pale with mortification. The man had never made the slightest objection to our friendly intercourse, and this unexpected attack was entirely indefensible.

“Please put me ashore,” said Miss Ruth. And without a word, for I could not trust myself to speak, I landed her. And petulantly complaining that she never gave him one moment of her society, her father led her away.

An hour later, my soul still in a state of turmoil, but with the violence of its tossings somewhat abated, I entered one of the paths which led through the woods. After a few turns, I reached a point where I could see for quite a long distance to the other end of the path, which opened out upon the beach. There I perceived Mr. Enderton, sitting upon the little bench on which I had found Emily’s book. His back was towards me, and he seemed to be busily reading. About midway between him and myself I saw Miss Ruth, slowly walking towards me. Her eyes were fixed upon the ground, and she had not seen me.

Stepping to one side I awaited her approach. When she came near I accosted her.

“Miss Ruth,” said I, “has your father been talking to you of me?”

She looked up quickly, evidently surprised at my being there. “Yes,” she said, “he has told me that it is not — suitable that I should be with you as much as I have been since we came here.”

There was something in this remark that roused again the turmoil which had begun to subside within me. There was so much that was unjust and tyrannical, and — what perhaps touched me still deeper — there was such a want of consideration and respect in this behavior of Mr. Enderton that it brought to the front some very incongruous emotions. I had been superciliously pushed aside, and I found I was angry. Something was about to be torn from me, and I found I loved it.

“Ruth,” said I, stepping up close to her, “do you like to be with me as you have been?”

If Miss Ruth had not spent such a large portion of her life in the out-of-the-world village of Nanfouchong; if she had not lived among those simple-hearted missionaries, where it was never necessary to conceal her emotions or her sentiments; if it had not been that she never had had emotions or sentiments that it was necessary to conceal, I do not believe that when she answered me she would have raised her eyes to me with a look in

them of a deep-blue sky seen through a sort of Indian summer mist, and that gazing thus she would have said :

“Of course I like it.”

“Then let us make it suitable,” I said, taking both her hands in mine.

There was another look, in which the skies shone clear and bright, and then, in a moment, it was all done.

About five minutes after this I said to her, “Ruth, shall we go to your father?”

“Certainly,” she answered. And together we walked along the thickly shaded path.

The missionary still sat with his back towards us; and, being so intent upon his book, I found that by keeping my eyes upon him it was perfectly safe to walk with my arm around Ruth until we had nearly reached him. Then I took her hand in mine, and we stepped in front of him.

“Father,” said Ruth, “Mr. Craig and I are going to be married.”

There was something very plump about this remark, and Mr. Enderton immediately raised his eyes from his book and fixed them, first upon his daughter and then upon me; then he let them drop, and through the narrow space between us he gazed out over the sea.

"Well, father," said Ruth, a little impatiently, "what do you think of it?"

Mr. Enderton leaned forward and picked up a leaf from the ground. This he placed between the open pages of his book and closed it.

"It seems to me," he said, "that on many accounts the arrangement you propose may be an excellent one. Yes," he added more decidedly, "I think it will do very well indeed. I shall not be at all surprised if we are obliged to remain on this island for a considerable time, and, for my part, I have no desire to leave it at present. And when you shall place yourself, Ruth, in a position in which you will direct the domestic economies of the establishment, I hope that you will see to it that things generally are made more compatible with comfort and gentility, and, as regards the table, I may add with palatability."

Ruth and I looked at each other, and then together we promised that as far as in us lay we would try to make the life of Mr. Enderton a happy one, not only while we were on the island, but ever afterward.

We were promising a great deal, but at that moment we felt very grateful.

Then he stood up, shook us both by the hands, and we left him to his book.

When Ruth and I came walking out of the woods and approached the house, Mrs. Aleshine was standing outside, not far from the kitchen. When she saw us she gazed steadily at us for a few moments, a strange expression coming over her face. Then she threw up both her hands, and, without a word, she turned and rushed indoors.

We had not reached the house before Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine came hurrying out together. Running up to us with a haste and an excitement I had never seen in either of them, first one and then the other took Ruth into her arms and kissed her with much earnestness. Then they turned upon me and shook my hands with hearty vigor, expressing, more by their looks and actions than their words, a triumphant approbation of what I had done.

"The minute I laid eyes on you," said Mrs. Aleshine, "I knowed it was all right. There was n't no need of askin' questions."

I now became fearful lest, in the exuberance of their satisfaction, these good women might reveal to Ruth the plans they had laid for our matrimonial future, and the reluctance I had shown in entering into them. My countenance must have expressed my apprehensions, for Mrs. Aleshine, her ruddy face glowing with warmth, both mental

and physical, gave me a little wink, and drew me to one side.

"You need n't suppose that we 've ever said anythin' to Miss Ruth, or that we 're goin' to. It's a great deal better to let her think you did it all yourself."

I felt like resenting this imputation upon the independence of my love-making, but at this happy moment I did not want to enter into a discussion, and therefore merely smiled.

"I 'm so glad, I don't know how to tell it," continued Mrs. Aleshine, as Mrs. Lecks and Ruth walked towards the house.

I was about to follow, but my companion detained me.

"Have you spoke to the parson?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," said I, "and he seems perfectly satisfied. I am rather surprised at this, because of late he has been in such a remarkably bad humor."

"That 's so," said Mrs. Aleshine; "there's no gettin' round the fact that he 's been a good deal crosser than two sticks. You see, Mr. Craig, that Mrs. Lecks and me, we made up our minds that it was n't fair to the Dusantes to let that rich missionary go on payin' nothin' but four dollars a week apiece for him and his daughter, and if we could n't get no more out of him one way, we 'd

do it in another. It was fair enough that if he did n't pay more he ought to get less ; and so we gave him more fish and not so much bread, the same as we did the sailor men, and we weakened his tea, and sent him just so much sugar, and no more ; and, as for openin' boxes of sardines for him, which there was no reason why they should n't be left here for the Dusantes, I just would n't do it, though he said he 'd got all the fresh fish he wanted when he was in China. And then we agreed that it was high time that that libr'ry should be cleaned up, and we went to work at it, not mindin' what he said ; for it 's no use tellin' me that four dollars a week will pay for a front room and good board, and the use of a library all day. And, as there was n't no need of both of us cleanin' one room, Mrs. Leeks, she went into the parlor, where he 'd took his books, and begun there. And then, again, we shut down on Mr. Dusante's dressing-gown. There was no sense includin' the use of that in his four dollars a week, so we brushed it up, and camphored it, and put it away. We just wanted to let him know that if he undertook to be skinflinty, he 'd better try it on somebody else besides us. We could see that he was a good deal upset, for, if ever a man liked to have things quiet and comfortable around him,

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and everything his own way, that man is that missionary. But we did n't care if we did prod him up a little. Mrs. Lecks and me, we both agreed that it would do him good. Why, he 'd got into such a way of shettin' himself up in himself, that he did n't even see that his daughter was goin' about with a young man, and fixin' her affections on him more and more every day, when he never had no idea, as could be proved by witnesses, of marryin' her."

"Mrs. Aleshine," said I, looking at her very steadfastly, "I believe, after all, that you and Mrs. Lecks had your own way in regard to hurrying up this matter."

"Yes," said she, with happy complacency, "I should n't wonder if we had. Stirrin' up the parson was our last chance, and it was n't much trouble to do it."

Mrs. Lecks, whose manner towards me for the last few days had been characterized by cold severity, now resumed her former friendly demeanor, although she was not willing to let the affair pass over without some words of reproach.

"I must say, Mr. Craig," she remarked the next morning, "that I was gettin' pretty well outdone with you. I was beginnin' to think that a young man that could n't see and would n't see what was

good for him, did n't deserve to have it; and if Miss Ruth's father had just come down with a heavy foot and put an end to the whole business, I'm not sure I'd been sorry for you. But it's all right at last, and by-gones is by-gones. And now, what we've got to do is to get ready for the weddin'."

"The wedding!" I exclaimed.

Mrs. Lecks regarded me with an expression in which there was something of virtuous indignation and something of pity. "Mr. Craig," said she, "if there ever was anybody that wanted a guardeen, it's you. Now, just let me tell you this. That Mr. Enderton ain't to be trusted no further than you can see him, and not so fur, neither, if it can be helped. He's willin' for you to have Miss Ruth now, because he's pretty much made up his mind that we're goin' to stay here; and as he considers you the master of this island, of course he thinks it'll be for his good for his daughter to be mistress of it. For one thing, he would n't expect to pay no board then. But just let him get away from this island, and just let him set his eyes on some smooth-faced young fellow that'll agree to take him into the concern and keep him for nuthin' on books and tea, he'll just throw you over without winkin'. And Miss Ruth is not the girl to marry

you against his will, if he opens the Bible and piles texts on her, which he is capable of doin'. If in any way you two should get separated when you leave here, there's no knowin' when you 'd ever see each other again, for where he'll take her nobody can tell. He's more willin' to set down and stay where he finds himself comfortable than anybody I've met yet."

"Of course," I said, "I'm ready to be married at any moment, but I don't believe Miss Ruth and her father will consent to anything so speedy."

"Don't you get into the way," said Mrs. Lecks, "of beforehand believin' this or that. It don't pay. Just you go to her father, and talk to him about it; and if you and him agree, it 'll be easy enough to make her see the sense of it. You attend to them, and I 'll see that everythin' is got ready. And you 'd better fix the day for to-morrow, for we can't stay here much longer, and there 's a lot of house-cleanin' and bakin' and cookin' to be done before we go."

I took this advice, and broached the subject to Mr. Enderton.

"Well, sir," said he, laying down his book, "your proposition is decidedly odd; I may say, very odd indeed. But it is, perhaps, after all, no odder than many things I have seen. Among the

various denominational sects I have noticed occurrences quite as odd; quite as odd, sir. For my part I have no desire to object to an early celebration of the matrimonial rites. I may say, indeed, that I am of the opinion that a certain amount of celerity in this matter will conduce to the comfort of all concerned. It has been a very unsatisfactory thing to me to see my daughter occupying a subordinate position in our little family, where she has not even the power to turn household affairs into the channels of my comfort. To-morrow, I think, will do very well indeed. Even if it should rain, I see no reason why the ceremony should be postponed."

The proposition of a wedding on the morrow was not received by Ruth with favor. She was unprepared for such precipitancy. But she finally yielded to arguments; not so much to mine, I fear, as to those offered by Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine.

For the rest of that day the three mariners were kept very busy, bringing in green things to deck the parlor, and doing every imaginable kind of work necessary to a wedding which Mrs. Aleshine was willing to give into their hands. As for herself and her good friend, they put themselves upon their mettle as providers of festivals. They made

cakes, pies, and I never knew, half so well as the three sailors, how many other kinds of good things. Besides all this, they assisted Ruth to fit herself out in some degree in a manner becoming to a bride. Some light and pretty adornments of dress were borrowed from Emily or Lucille, they knew not which, and, after having been "done up" and fluted and crimped by Mrs. Lecks, were incorporated by Ruth into her costume with so much taste that on the wedding morning she appeared to me to be dressed more charmingly than any bride I ever saw.

The three sailors had done their own washing and ironing, and appeared in cleanly garb, and with hair and beards well wet and brushed. Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine put on their best bibs and tuckers, and Mr. Enderton assumed his most clerical air, as he stood behind a table in the parlor and married Ruth and me.

"This," said Mr. Enderton, as we were seated at the wedding feast, "is a most creditable display of attractive viands; but I may say, my dear Ruth, that I think I perceived the influence of the happy event of to-day even before it took place. I have lately had a better appetite for my food, and have experienced a greater enjoyment of my surroundings."

"I should think so," murmured Mrs. Aleshine in my ear, "for we 'd no sooner knowed that you two were to make a match of it, than we put an extry spoonful of tea into his pot, and stopped scrubbin' the libr'ry."

For the next two days all was bustle and work at the island. Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine would not consent to depart without leaving everything in the best possible order, so that the Dusantes might not be dissatisfied with the condition of their house when they returned. It was, in fact, the evident desire of the two women to gratify their pride in their housewifely abilities by leaving everything better than they found it.

Mr. Enderton was much surprised at these preparations for immediate departure. He was very well satisfied with his life on the island, and had prepared his mind for an indefinite continuance of it, with the position of that annoying and obdurate Mrs. Lecks filled by a compliant and affectionate daughter. He had no reasonable cause for complaint, for the whole subject of the exhaustion of our supply of provisions and the necessity of an open-boat trip to an inhabited island had been fully discussed before him. But he was so entirely engrossed in the consideration of his own well-being, that this discussion of our

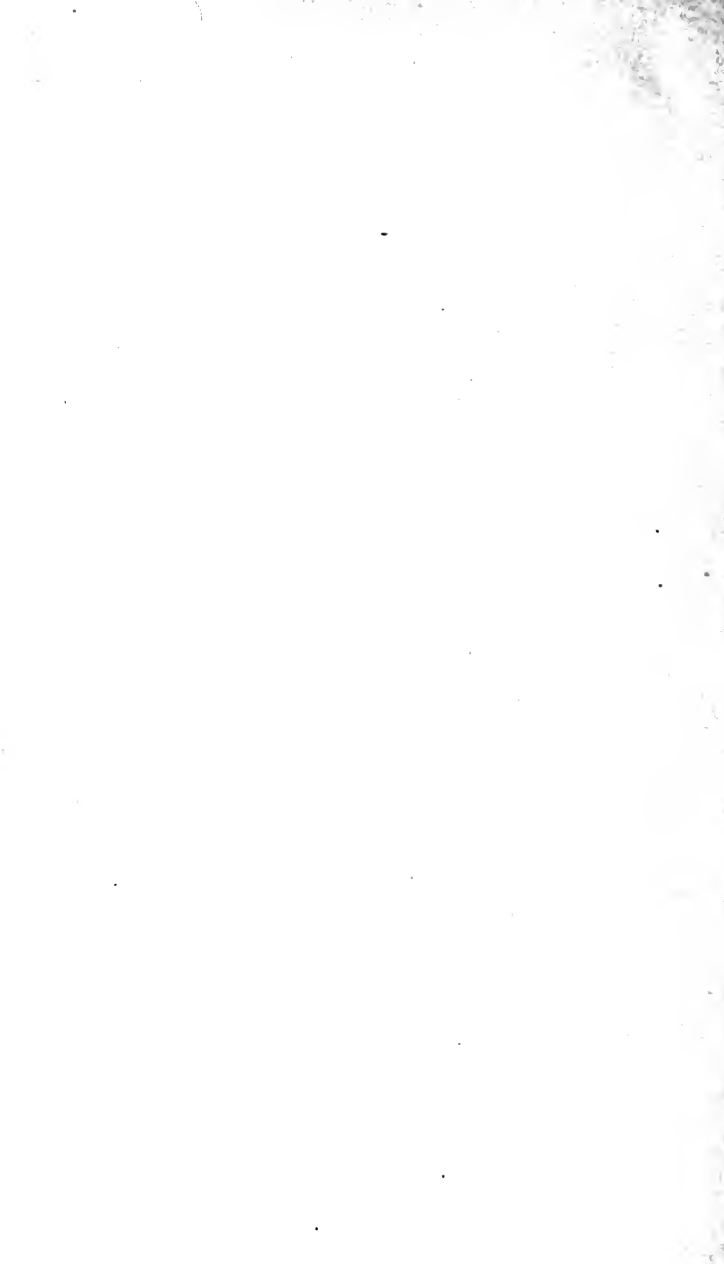
plans had made no impression upon him. He now became convinced that a conspiracy had been entered into against him, and fell into an unpleasant humor. This, however, produced very little effect upon any of us, for we were all too busy to notice his whims. But his sudden change of disposition made me understand how correct were the opinions of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine concerning him. If I had left that island with my marriage with Ruth depending upon Mr. Enderton's coöperation, my prospects of future happiness would have been at the mercy of his caprices.

Very early on a beautiful morning Ruth and I started out on our wedding journey in the long-boat. Mr. Enderton was made as comfortable as possible in the stern, with Ruth near him. Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine sat facing each other, each with a brown paper package by her side, containing the life-preserver on which she had arrived. These were to be ever cherished as memorials of a wonderful experience. The three sailors and I took turns at the oars. The sea was smooth, and there was every reason to believe that we should arrive at our destination before the end of the day. Mrs. Aleshine had supplied us with an abundance of provisions, and with the

exception of Mr. Enderton, who had not been permitted to take away any of the Dusante books, we were a contented party.

“As long as the flour held out,” remarked Mrs. Aleshine, “I ’d never been willin’ to leave that island till the Dusantes came back, and we could have took Emily or Lucille, whichever it was that kept house, and showed her everythin’, and told her just what we had done. But when they do come back,” she added, “and read that letter which Mr. Craig wrote and left for them, and find out all that happened in their country-place while they was away; and how two of us was made happy for life; and how two more of us, meanin’ Mrs. Lecks and me, have give up goin’ to Japan, intendin’, instid of that, writin’ to my son to come home to America, and settle down in the country he ought to live in,—why, then, if them Dusantes ain’t satisfied it ’s no use for anybody to ever try to satisfy ’em.”

“I should think not,” said Mrs. Lecks, “with the weddin’ cards on the parlor table, not a speck of dust in any corner, and the board money in the ginger-jar.”



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